Cover

Underground Babylon
THE SURPRISING JOURNEY OF PHILLY AND CLAUDE
IVAR MUÑOZ-ROJAS
EDITORIAL LA FELGUERA

Dedicated to

Ana, Maria and Dani, my wife and my children

In honor of Claude Bessy
(1945-1999)

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IVAR MUÑOZ-ROJAS

UNDERGROUND BABYLON

THE SURPRISING JOURNEY OF PHILLY AND CLAUDE

Philomena Winstanley at *Slash's* headquarters in *The Decline of Western Civilization* (Penelope Spheeris, 1981)

INTRODUCTION

THE PLASTIC BOX WITH PHOTOS OF JOHNNY ROTTEN

“Some make money, others make history.”

Philly looks at a photo of John Lydon and sits pensively. In the image, the singer of the Sex Pistols and PiL comes off smiling and relaxed, in what looks like an apartment living room. “I took the picture in my house,” she says. We’re at the Poblenou Terrace, on the outskirts of Barcelona. It’s a pleasant spring evening in May, and we just met. On top of a table sit a pair of coffees and dozens of photographs taken by this Englishwoman, about 60 years old, with a sweet voice and a sharp look. Nick Cave, the Sex Pistols, Black Flag and the Dead Kennedys appear in the photos, along with a long list of other legendary musicians.

Philly reviews her photographs like anyone who just found an album during a move. She hasn’t seen them in 15 years. After a few minutes, she launches an unavoidable question: “Can you tell me why you have my photos? It’s just that I don’t understand,” she says in Spanish with a light English accent. The answer isn’t easy, or even logical to give.

The first time I heard her name, Philomena Winstanley, was on a van ride from Valencia to Murcia. Servando Rocha, one of the editors on this book, and I played together in a punk group (Muletrain) and, on this trip from one concert to another, he told me about some photos of mythic punk bands that a friend from Barcelona, Marta, had given him.

This girl had them, explained Servando, because an English woman had given them to her years before. They had met in a photocopy center in downtown Barcelona, where Marta was making copies of her punk fanzine, *Puñalada*. This caught Philomena Winstanley’s attention, who told her that she had photographed various punk rock bands in her youth. After talking a while, she invited Marta to her house. She was leaving the city and wanted to leave many memories behind. She had lots of photos that could be of interest to Marta.

Marta went to visit her and left the apartment with an enormous green plastic box, full of black and white photos taken by this Englishwoman. The only thing that she asked for in return for the pictures, Servando told me, was to respect the punk spirit with which they had been taken. They were meant to reach and be shared with whomever had true interest in them.

Afterwards, Marta published some in her fanzine. They were exhibited in some squat house… the photos were a secret shared by a few in the underground catacombs. Servando, after discovering their existence, wanted to publish them in his editorial, which is why he contacted Marta, who put up no objection in giving them to him. They met at this friend’s house, who had the box in the back of her bedroom closet. She insisted on the following on behalf of Philomena: whatever was done must be done honestly and respectfully.

During that trip between Valencia and Murcia, my bandmate and I commented that some sort of meaning had to be given to these images. It had all the ingredients of what could become a great story: coincidences, an aura of mystery and, most particularly in this case, characters from the music we were crazy about (“Dude, there’s pictures of Black Flag,” Servando said excitedly). For my part, I couldn’t imagine that it was the first step of a once-in-a-lifetime adventure that would take me to meet incredible people all over the world, both known and unknown. A few weeks later, that plastic green box was at my house. On top of the photos, it was full of unanswered questions. Why were there pictures of such respected musicians completely out of place from where you would normally find them (like the LA hardcore band Black Flag and the Australian Rocker Nick Cave, for example)? What was the mysterious photographer doing with them all- and was she still alive?

From the start, my efforts to find Philomena Winstanley were in vain; even in the era of Google, it can still be complicated to find someone. We didn't have any friends in common to ask, none of the Philomena Winstanleys I wrote to on Facebook responded… When it seemed like all doors were shut, I received a response to an email sent to a Bolivian website, to some sort of NGO. Bingo. It was the Philomena Winstanley that I was looking for, and she didn't mind talking over the phone. She lived in Sucre, the capital of Bolivia.

My first conversation with her was like finding a nugget of gold in a stream. She said that she had worked with her boyfriend on the first punk magazine in Los Angeles, at the end of the 70s; that she had lived in London, where her boyfriend became friends with Nick Cave. She recounted that she and her boyfriend had fought because he had gone partying with the members of Blondie without telling her anything…

Soon it became clear that this boyfriend, Claude Bessy, was the other main protagonist of this story. Everything that she recounted about him sounded witty, not to say hilarious. She spoke with the respectful and affective tone one reserves for the departed. With Claude's death, she had decided to leave Barcelona, the last city where they lived together.

After two or three phone interviews, she gave me some good news. She was going to come to Europe for a few weeks and wanted to stop in Barcelona. It would be a good chance to meet each other in person. It was also a unique opportunity to figure out who many of those who appeared in her photos were; because not all of the subjects were famous, like Nick Cave or John Lydon (there were pictures of lesser-known bands like Bpeople, among those that few remember).

The great day is finally here. I have the photographer with her photos in front of me, on the terrace in Poblenou. My nerves betray me, and just sitting there, I spill my coffee. Fortunately, from the first minute, she is gracious and shows limitless patience. Over an entire afternoon, she responds to dozens of questions. She talks about when she met The Beatles, the first punks of Los Angeles, her friendship with celebrity punk and postpunk British bands (Wire, Throbbing Gristle, Magazine…), and above all, she talks about Claude.

As she shares her memories, she goes on weaving an incredible story; a captivating trip through different cities, in which love, music, and friendship meet. Because, as becomes clear through everything she tells, in this trip, friends are more than mere fellow-travelers. They play a crucial role.

Black Flag (Photograph: Philomena Winstanley)

"It will be hard for many people to understand them," wrote Claude about the bend in *Slash.*

"Please, call me Philly and not Philomena," she directs at the moment when we say our goodbyes and adds: "whatever doubt you may have, write or call me" (Later will come many interviews, by phone and in person). *The next step is to locate all those friends that she has talked about*, I think while I see her figure disappear among the ancients in banks and children playing ball in Poblenou. *The feeling now isn't of having struck gold; I feel the responsibility of telling this extraordinary story.*

The story of Philly and Claude.

Chapter 1

AN ELECTROMAGNETIC STORM IN SANTA MONICA

Can’t you see that flash of fire?

Ten times brighter than the day

And behold a mighty city

Broken in the dust again

“Pride of Man,” Quicksilver Messenger Service

Philly landed in Los Angeles in the spring of 1973. She was 24 years old, going there to disconnect from England for three months. It wasn't the first time she had gone to a new city looking for a new lease on life: as a teenager, she abandoned Birmingham to live in London. "I left my parents' home at 16 years of age because I had a bad relationship with my father; he abused me psychologically. I packed my backpack and left for good," this daughter of an insurance agent and a housewife, the seventh of ten siblings, remembers.

In London, she settled down in her brother Paul's house. Paul was a writer who was influenced by the Beat Generation. He was key to her first travels in the British Capital.

"We had a great relationship, and he helped me find work as an *au pair* for families," she says. The 60s advanced, and London was a cultural hotbed: Each week it seemed like a new revolution would change everything. The boys dropped their long hair, and the girls showed off their miniskirts.

As a teenager she lived Beatlemania up close. "I went to see The Beatles with a good friend, Nicole." She told me: "you have to scream. Don't you see everyone screaming?" Philly remembers, and she points out: "I didn't want to, and I asked her, 'but what if I hate screaming?' So, I spent the whole concert with her screaming, and myself shut up."

With this same friend, Philly recounts how she lived the great dream of any Beatlemaniac: "Nicole was very on the ball and knew that The Beatles were in a luxury restaurant, in the center of London. To enter, she said that we were journalists, and we got in line in the press meeting room. I was dying of embarrassment, because I looked younger than I was… And on top of that, I went dressed in clothing my mother had sewn for me," she explains.

From that encounter, she guards revealing and concise memories: "John was rude, George seemed like the nicest and most normal, Ringo played along with our joke and pretended to believe that we were journalists, and Paul showed some sort of interest in us, as if he were flirting, or something like that," she recounts. They signed her copy of *Please Please Me*, which to her great regret disappeared mysteriously some time thereafter in a shared apartment where she lived.

The years in London were full of experimentation and growth: from being an *au pair,* she went to work as a secretary for an independent film distributor and in the British Delegation of the magazine *Rolling Stone.* From going to Beatles concerts, with crazed fans, she ingrained herself into the hippie and psychedelic movements, which rose to the surface as the 60s passed. "The hippies were the authentic rebels that broke away from everything. Much more than the punks afterwards. Letting your hair grow long was very shocking to the older generation of that era," Philomena adds. At one party thrown by *Rolling Stone* magazine, the iconic magazine of the hippie counterculture, she took LSD for the first time. She did it without knowing. She remembers it clearly. "The heads of the magazine had organized a party for the advertisers, and various groups played. The boys from Quicksilver Messenger Service (a psychedelic rock group from San Francisco) tossed tabs in a bowl with orange juice that was there for those who didn't drink alcohol, without telling anybody. Sly and the Family Stone (a funk band from San Francisco) also played, and during the concert, I started to see how the singer's teeth changed color. I was fairly innocent, but I knew what was happening to me because my little brother took a lot of acid and had told me about it," she says.

For her, the experience was both comical and weird; for the older attendees, it was much more traumatic. The evening ended with dozens of ambulances attending the bigwigs, poisoned by the lysergic potion. It was the 60s: naive, daring, and at times, also dangerous.

But nothing remained of that colorful, reckless, and novel London at the start of the next decade. At the beginning of the 70s, the oil crisis expanded, and the city became very grey; which is why, when Philly received the invitation from a friend to visit her in Los Angeles, they didn't hesitate for a second. She felt like crossing the channel to have new experiences, and her boss at the film distributor where she worked didn't object to her vacating her post for a few months to travel and get to know the world.

However, the adventure didn't begin well. Her colleague in Los Angeles hadn't told her that there was only one bed in her house. Sharing a bed with him was not in her plans, so Philly saw herself obligated to improvise. Fortunately, at the exit of the Los Angeles airport, she found herself with an old childhood friend, one whom she hadn't seen in years, who told her that there was an open position as an *au pair* in a French family's house with their 5-year-old daughter. Thanks to this coincidence—the first of many that marked her arrival to the city—, the uncomfortable situation was resolved shortly by getting in contact with this family.

The French family lived in Westwood, a residential zone located in the center of Los Angeles. Although everything appeared well, the experience ended up bittersweet: "It was sunny, and they had a pool, and coming from London, that was something incredible, but the mother was terrible with me: she made me eat in the kitchen alone while they ate in the living room," recalls Philly.

Although the bad start was soon forgotten, in those first few weeks in the city, she had a stroke of luck that would change her life forever, one of those turns that is typically only depicted in nearby Hollywood. It happened in Santa Monica, the famous beach district of Los Angeles that wasn't the happy district of today, but rather remote and inhabited by fishermen and drunkards. Philly liked to go there to walk, swim, and disconnect from the French family. It was where she met another French man, who would end up being the love of her life: Claude Bessy.

It happened in Al's Kitchen, a seafood restaurant on the oceanfront, where Claude was a waiter. It was love at first site, as Julie Stone recounts, a friend of the couple who also worked in this since disappeared locale: "One morning at the crack of dawn, before opening, I was picking up junk in the front of the restaurant, and a girl in a very informal but cute and chic bathing suit arrived. She was alone and stayed waiting for us to open. I might have told Claude that there was a gorgeous woman who wanted to enter. Anyway, shortly after, Claude appeared and immediately, he looked at her, and she looked at him. It was an incredible moment, like being in a magnetic field formed by mother nature. He was handsome, charming, fun, smart, fast and so French; while she was sweet, shy, witty, cheerful, beautiful, and so British."

From that first decisive encounter, Philly recalls everything that made her feel fascinated by Claude's very particular style of dress. "He wore red and blue shoes, like a clown, and a fake ruby ring," she recounts, though hung from an ear, as if it were an earring. "He had his ear pierced without anesthesia because he didn't have any money to pay for it, so that's why he wore it: for him, it symbolized overcoming," she notes.

Soon after they broke the ice. She was carrying a book that he was also reading, another important coincidence.

“I don’t remember the title, but the book described scientific explanations of the miracles from the Bible,” she explains. They started to talk about literature. One thing led to another, and before they knew it, they spent the whole night smoking joints in his apartment, five minutes away from the restaurant and right by the beach.

Claude was a grand orator who knew how to seduce with his gift of gab. It was rare for him to not make himself the center of attention at any party. He usually told his friends that he had arrived in the United States sneaking in from the US Mexico border. This wasn’t true, but his real story was no less fascinating.

In this page and the previous: The Santa Monica Pier at the end of the 70s (Photograph: Stadtflaneur)

Born in 1945, in Vire, a small city in Normandy, France, his childhood had been practically the opposite of Philly’s: he was an only child, and his parents, disciplined as they were, had been on top of him and his education. “His mother and father were schoolteachers and communists, something that clashed with the catholic religion that was ever present in the French school-system,” Philly recalls.

His parents eventually got tired of swimming against the currents on issues of education and ended up sending their son to the United States to get his bachelor’s degree in New Jersey. Being a family of limited resources, this was possible thanks to the fact that Claude was a brilliant student: he was among the best of his class, in all of France, and they gave him a scholarship to cross the Atlantic.

“Claude was very intelligent, and also very receptive and sensitive to things,” his partner emphasizes. At the same time, he was very anarchical and didn't get along too well with hierarchy or discipline. The academic world turned out to be very unattractive to him, and his promising career as a student started falling apart as soon as he reached adulthood. At the end of his period in New Jersey, he registered for the shortest and easiest class there was in the Paris-Sorbonne University: Theater.

Claude Singing with Catholic Discipline, alongside Phranc “The All-American Jewish Lesbian Folksinger” on guitar (Photograph: Philomena Winstanley)

“His parents wanted him to return to France, but he wanted to keep fluttering about in the United States,” Philly recalls. And that’s what he did: after a few semesters in Paris, he left the lecture halls to have a go at the United States once more. Between the end of the 60s and the beginning of the 70s, he ambled from one side of the United States to the other, living for a season in Seattle, until he finally settled in Santa Monica, in Los Angeles. There he survived on temporary jobs, falling in love with drugs and exploring in depth the Californian rock scene.

“With Claude I always got the impression that he didn’t feel much attachment to France,” recalls Susan Martin, artist and gallery director, who knew our protagonists when they started going out. Living in the moment intensely, without fear of risk, he got into all sorts of odd situations. “He had an extraordinary past, with all kinds of battles. Suddenly, he would tell you that he had known Jim Morrison, of The Doors, and that he had seemed like a dickhead,” explains Graham Lewis, another good friend of the couple, and member of Wire, the well-known post-punk band.

“Nevertheless, not everything was happy for Claude in that era. He fell hard into drugs; so much so that he even travelled to Afghanistan to –as he himself would say, “fry his brain” with all types of substances, over the course of a few months. His addictions got to the point that he started injecting amphetamines. It was a turbulent time that he almost never escaped. “Before meeting me he had a very bad experience with drugs, in which he had an out-of-body experience,” recalls Philly. This marked a point of inflection: Someone so alive didn’t want to die so young.

Various Cassettes and recordings of Claude’s from the era that reached Slash or Rough Trade

Claude decided to blot out that period and make a new start. And that was exactly when he met Philly. “Claude loved to say that Philomena had saved him. She helped him put his life in order, when he was leaving a manic phase that he had absolutely exacerbated with speed,” recalls Kerry Colonna, another good friend of the couple from that time. This coincides with what Claude himself would relate to Jon Savage, a reputable British journalist, years later. “Before meeting Philomena, I was scum. I had just ditched a serious addiction.”

Cupid’s arrow was so strong that, a few weeks after meeting each other, Philly changed her plans entirely: instead of returning to London as she had planned, she spent the money she had saved for her return ticket on an apartment in Santa Monica, close to where her new boyfriend lived. Her stay there, however, didn’t last long. “Claude came by every afternoon. He would buzz my apartment and say: ‘What are you doing?’ And of course, I didn’t have any books or TV or radio or anything, so I would always respond: ‘nothing.’ I would go downstairs and leave for his house,” she says.

Renting two apartments while spending every day together didn’t make sense, so she went to live with Claude, but under one condition: “I told him to change the wine he drank. He usually drank a brand called ‘Red Mountain,’ which they sold in 5-liter bottles, and I asked him to change to one that they sold in a normal bottle. I couldn’t understand how a Frenchman could drink such bad wine,” she recalls. Now, the next step for Philly was finding a job, and once again, coincidences played in her favor. The same friend who had offered her a place to stay in his home when she arrived in LA made an appointment with her at Universal Studios, where he was working, to give her a hand. Going to the interview, she ran into a group of picketers who, as paradoxical as it may sound, helped her get her foot in the door in the audiovisual world. “They were protesting at the gates of Universal Studios. I asked them where I could find work, and one of them told me to go talk to Bill Melendez,” she told me.

Bill Melendez turned out to be the director of animation for *Snoopy,* the celebrity cartoon dog, and a heavyweight in the animation industry in Hollywood. With a little cunning, Philly got a job while avoiding one handicap: she didn’t have any idea how to draw. Her job was to color animation cells. “After a few days, it was clear that I had lied, but he was very nice and gave me a second chance, and the department supervisor showed me,” she remembers, putting in hours, until the point that she would dream that she saw this dog painted on the walls everywhere in Santa Monica. She not only managed to keep her job, but a few months later, she was promoted.

Philly’s adventure in LA couldn’t have worked out better: in little time she had a job, love, and a home. “I couldn’t believe that I would live in front of the beach. That, for an Englishwoman, was like a dream.”

She also couldn’t imagine that the three months she had planned to spend in Los Angeles would turn out to be seven years.

CHAPTER 2

blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly

nor standeth in the ways of sinners

nor sitteth in the seat of scornful

I would sit

"Kickboy Face," Prince Jazzbo

By the middle of the 70s, Los Angeles was no longer a very stimulating city for rock music. The triumph of The Doors, legends of the city at the end of the 60s, remained far behind, and the hippie movement, that had predicted love and revolution, had been gentrified. The most famous hippies now lived in mansions, far from the street and their history. What you heard on the radio was soft rock from Fleetwood Mac, The Eagles and other similar bands that recorded albums with million-dollar budgets; above all else for massive quantities of cocaine.

Differently from other important rock and roll cities, like London or New York, in LA there were hardly any small concert venues for local bands to play in without a contract but with hopes of exploring new sounds. There wasn't an underground, "there was no real local live circuit … with any luck you would find a group of versions of Cheap Trick," remembers John Doe, bassist from X, one of the first punk bands in LA.

But something interesting was cooking in Philly and Claude's apartment. Reggae would be playing at all hours. This music with its repetitive rhythm, hypnotic melodies, and rebellious spirit burst out of Jamaica in the 60s, and with Jamaican emigrants, arrived in London at the end of the decade. There it took root and expanded to the rest of the world, above all, thanks to the blockbuster film, *The Harder they Come*, which premiered in 1972, starring the Jamaican Jimmy Cliff.

For Philly and Claude, reggae tied them together, although it isn't clear who discovered it first. "Both of us loved it. When we started living together, we discovered that we had a ton of the same records," she recalls. "Philly was the person who showed me reggae. She told me about the movie *The Harder they Come*, and I started listening to things like The Wailers," the journalist Jon Savage would recount years later. In either case, the impact of this music on Claude was decisive: "Halfway through the 70s he wouldn't listen to anything but reggae, because of how bothered he was by white shit … Heavy metal was everywhere," he would also explain.

Reggae was barely listened to in any other part of LA, and the parties that the couple organized at their home left a large mark on their friends. Susan Marin recalls: "Claude usually was the house DJ. The first time I was at one of those parties we all started to dance around the whole apartment. I remember thinking: 'Finally! This is what I've always been looking for.' Nobody listened to reggae back then. We didn't even know what it was. And he had all those records that didn't have labels or if they did, they were left blank because they were test pressings. Only he knew what each record held. I believe he brought them from Jamaica."

That trip, like many that the couple would make thereafter, was marked by unforeseen circumstances. “The idea was to go to Jamaica by way of Mexico, on a boat that shipped bananas. But it never arrived, and we had to take a flight, which ended up being much more expensive than expected,” Philomena recalls. Once we were on the Caribbean island, the next ten days were spent in cheap hotels, between Kingston, Jamaica’s capital, and Montego Bay, the country’s second city.

“We slept over bars, and it was all very rudimentary,” she remembers. They wanted to get steeped in the Jamaican spirit, and Claude brought with him a typewriter to document the experience. “In the end he barely used it. I told him: ‘but, why did you bother bringing it?” Philly remarks. Back then, her boyfriend was focused on a project that combined reggae and writing, his two biggest passions. It was called *Angeleno Dread*, a fanzine about Jamaican music.

On top of being a smart and clever orator, Claude also wrote in a lively and direct way. “I believe he made writing look easy, but it isn’t at all. Getting a text to feel so spontaneous must have taken a lot of work,” recalls Savage. That’s how it was: it killed me to write,” Claude would recount years later about his writing method. Once I had the writings, I would photocopy them and pass them to my friends, under the name *Angeleno Dread.*

He signed them with the nickname Kickboy Face, the title of a song from Jamaican Prince Jazzbo, a reggae music producer who had some successes at the beginning of the 70s.

Photo taken at the free concert against racism, The Free Rock Against Racism Concern, celebrated in MacArthur Park (in the center of Los Angeles). The photographed group is called Prairie Fire, an unknown formation whose leftist political themes proved to be completely behind the times to Claude. “It [the photograph] is of a weird group. What should have turned out to be boring and funny, transforms into something lightly respectable,” he says in the four lines that he dedicates to the band. The name of the band possibly comes from *Prairie Fire*, the newspaper of the American armed group, the Weathermen.

(Photograph: Philomena Winstanley)

Poster of *The Harder they Come* (Perry Henzell, 1972)

“I picked it because this theme had an anti-Catholic message, and because I loved how the name Kickboy Face sounded,” he would explain later. He couldn’t imagine that this alias would follow him for the rest of his life.

Angeleno Dread was a small but important publication. They weren’t more than stapled photocopies, but they helped him find his own voice for writing. And not just that. It planted the seed of reggae in the city: as the years went by, it would be considered the first fanzine about reggae in LA. The same as would happen to him later, Claude was a pioneer without setting out to be one or to even blow his own trumpet. “All this professionalization of art and promotion of oneself didn’t exist back then. We did small things, but they didn’t matter. It wasn’t about making an impact,” Susan Martin recounts, who at the time was a mover and shaker in the bustling Angeleno art world. This indifference towards what others may think is in his writings: they are scathing, ingenious, and sometimes hurtful.

Little by little the couple made new friends together. At first, they moved around mostly with the bohemians and hippies in Santa Monica, but through their friend Susan Martin, they got into contact with film and art personalities.

Al's Kitchen, the restaurant where our protagonists met and where Claude worked, ends up becoming important to this story again. "I think the starting point, the big bang that would lead to a ton of things afterwards, was a breakfast at Al's Kitchen," Susan Martin recalls. She explains why: "I had a new boyfriend, Bob Biggs, who was from the design world, art, movies… Philomena and Claude always told me that they wanted to meet him. So, Bob and I made plans to have breakfast in the restaurant where Claude worked. We connected immediately. It was like Cupid's arrow hit all four of us. After that, we started doing everything together." From dusk till dawn, Overnight, they formed a gang that would change Philly and Claude's life completely; above all for Bob Biggs, who will have a major role in this story later.

Genuine, vivid and with personalities as distinct as they were complementary, they got along very well in the art and entertainment world. "The best part about going out with Philomena and Claude is that everything turned into fun," recalls Stephen Randall, a friend from those years and former editor for *Playboy.*

The parties in their apartment ended up happening more and more often. "Claude loved revelry. If it were up to him, he would have been partying every day of his life," Philly says. A typical afternoon in their house would go something like this: Around six in the evening Claude would call up his friends; around seven, the first few would arrive; at eight, the party would really get started, and around nine, his girlfriend would get home from work in a taxi that her bosses would call for her whenever the workday would go on too long. Afterwards, the revelry would go on until the wee hours of the night, with all of their consequences: the next day it wasn't odd for Philly to arrive late to work, which was the reason her colleagues gave her the nickname *Miss Ten O'Clock*, for the time she would usually show up, much later than everyone else.

With an extra glass, Claude would carry his provocation to the extreme, and then, nobody knew what could happen, like that time when they were at a party with some television people and he decided to throw a pitcher of beer on top of a big-wig, a funny and unexpected moment that Philly remembers: "Claude was talking with someone who was very important, and when he told him that he was a waiter, the other guy turned around, facing away from him, giving him the impression that he didn't want to lose time talking with him, like he wasn't worth his time."

Anybody would have bit their tongue or made a face, but not Claude. He poured out his beer on top of the impertinent interlocutor, who was left drenched, while the rest of the party looked on in astonishment. "He said that that man was an idiot and deserved to have the beer poured all over him," Philly remarks. The incident, as could be expected, didn't lead to a big fight. In fact, quite the opposite.

The next day, first thing in the morning, the apartment's telephone rang. Some producers, witnesses to the scene, had an unexpected offer: the French provocateur had fallen on their good graces, and they wanted to contract him for one of their productions. "We couldn't believe it. It seemed like a joke," Philly recalls. Judith Bell, an animation artist and friend of the couple, also remembers witnessing it: "They loved his bad boy act, his unparalleled, dark and dangerous beauty, his feline grace, and above all, his terrifying, sharp accent," she recounts.

They offered Claude a supporting role in *The Hardy Boys*, a children's television series, based on the adventure books of the same name. Claude got to play the part of "Frenchie," a rocker with a burnout hippie vibe, in the first episode of the second season.

The sequence in which he appears is fun and dear: the two brother protagonists have to go from Germany to Transylvania (Romania) to save their grandfather. To get there, they pay a little money to some hippie musicians with a beat-up van that they use to travel through Europe. It is here that Frenchie appears, with a scatter-brained appearance, outlandish clothing, all while barely opening his mouth. He can be seen singing, very happily, "Ob-la-di, Ob-la-da," from The Beatles, cramped up in the backseat, while they traverse forests and mountains in the night.

For the five days of shooting at Universal Studios, they paid him what he would have earned as a waiter for the whole year. And what was the first thing that Claude did with so much money? He bought a gift for his girlfriend: a Fujica photo camera, the same one she used to take the photos in this book.

Claude, to the right, as a Frenchified hippie, in *The Hardy Boys*. Below, another scene, On this occasion, cruising the continent in an old van while singing Beatles songs

Nervous Gender: experimental and ahead of their time (Photograph: Philomena Winstanley)

CHAPTER 3

LOOKING FOR PUNKS IN AN OLD DODGE

Everywhere I look, I get pressure from my peers

Some of them are straight and some of them are queers

Some of them are black and some of them are white

Some of them are wrong and some of them are right

Peer pressure, peer pressure, I can't say no

“Peer Pressure,” The Screamers

Rock scholars hardly ever agree on the question of when and where punk music began. There are those who mark year zero at the first Ramones concern in New York, in the spring of 1974; while others, instead, consider that it didn’t really exist as a distinct movement until two years later, when it exploded in a full summer wave in London, with the Sex Pistols at its forefront. However, what the vast majority does agree on is that it was a breath of fresh air for the music industry, which was otherwise stagnant and dormant.

In Los Angeles, punk took a little longer to explode, in part because there wasn’t a circuit of concert venues for smaller bands, as well as for the fact that the kingpins of the music industry in LA didn’t see any profit to be made off it. In the end, what did this music, that was so urban and noisy, portray in such a sunny and beach-filled environment? The success of The Runaways, the group of youngsters from Los Angeles, that triumphed in the mid-seventies, with a big emphasis on guitars, just before the arrival of punk rock, shines as an exception in this environment that was otherwise unfriendly to rock music.

However, just because it wasn’t visible doesn’t mean that punk didn’t exist in Los Angeles. A splinter group of young punks moved around Hollywood, taking acid and drinking cheap wine, dreaming of having a group someday. It was a small circle, alien to Philly, Claude, Susan, and this gang of friends. Although this would change in a short while.

Claude was introduced to punk through Steve Samiof, a designer and colleague of this world of filmmakers and artists. “Normally we were at their house; listening to reggae, drinking and taking Quaaludes (an analgesic that was sold in American Pharmacies at the time). We would smoke weed but we weren’t stoners,” Samiof remembers.

At one of these times was when he told Claude about an article in the *Los Angeles Times,* that told of the provocations of the Sex Pistols at some airport. This piqued both their interests, and Samiof got close to a store with imported records, where he bought some singles and albums. He played them for Claude, and both immediately became fascinated; especially with the first LP from The Damned (*Damned, Damned, Damned, 1977*), punk pioneers in London. It was the first step they took towards buying dozens and dozens of records: it was 1977, and every week, new punk bands would come out,

with dreams of turning everything upside down. Punk rock–like reggae–sounded crude and had a dangerous aura.

The great allure of punk—a well-established idea now, but revolutionary back then, was that to form a band you didn't necessarily have to be a great musician: It was enough to learn a few chords. This enticed thousands of kids with good ideas but with little skill to play. Wherever there was a good song, feedback or rhythmic tugs and pulls... it didn't matter! Samiof didn't play any instrument, but he wanted to contribute something to the movement. He worked as a layout editor for the *Star Review,* a small newspaper distributed in East Los Angeles. He knew the inner-workings of a written publication and came up with the idea that he could make a magazine about LA punk music. And that's how he put his hands to work, together with his girlfriend at the time, Melanie Nissen, who was a photographer. Claude could be a gold mine, he thought. "My first idea was to make a photo-magazine, together with my girlfriend, but I knew that Claude could write, so I told him about it," Samiof recounts.

Claude accepted the offer and decided to use his alias, Kickboy Face, which up until that point he had signed his work in *Angeleno Dread,* his reggae fanzine. "With its incorporation, it became a more mainstream publication. The intention was to give it the look of a professional magazine, more professional than a fanzine," explains Samiof. Making a publication with the look of a professional magazine wasn't such a crazy idea, keeping in mind that the costs of a small print run could be taken on by themselves, workers living day-to-day.

The fact that Samiof's girlfriend, Melanie Nissen, was a professional photographer made it easier to give things a careful appearance. Samiof and Melanie oversaw every part of the aesthetic, while Claude took care of the content. Philly also became a part of the project, and from the start, she took on the most thankless job on the editorial team: transcribing interviews. She wouldn't get to use the Fujica camera that her boyfriend had gifted her until later.

They established the humble editorial at Samiof's house: "I lived in a loft. It wasn't big, but it had enough space," he recalls about the space in Pico Boulevard, one of the main streets of Santa monica. The next step was to find the name for the fanzine, something that caused some doubts from the start. "Samiof wanted to call it *Sedition*, but that sounded horrible to me," Claude would recall years later. Finally, they decided to baptize it as *Slash*. "I don't remember how we came up with it," he would also explain. Samiof doesn't remember it clearly either, but he does remember how he designed the fanzine's striking logo—with bloody letters—it only took a few seconds. "I did it without thinking about it much, with a couple of brushstrokes," he says. Back then, he couldn't imagine that it would eventually become one of the most recognizable logos in the history of rock music.

They had the idea, the tools and even the name. now there was only one problem: nobody knew a single punk in LA. "We didn't have much to write about, apart from the few records we had and our interpretation of what was going on," Claude would likewise explain about those first steps.

The Go-Go's acting in Madame Wong's, an Asian restaurant that held punk concerts
(Photograph: Philomena Winstanley)

It is often said that if Muhammad didn't come to the mountain, the mountain would come to the Muhammed. And that was the philosophy that they applied: they hopped into Samiof's car ("an old,

second-hand Dodge, that cost me 200 dollars," he recalls) to track down dives and alleyways in search of punks. They didn't take long to complete the mission. According to Claude's version, someone told them about "some dudes with spiky hair that were roaming around Hollywood." These punks, explains Philly, were The Screamers. She gives more details: "I don't know very well where we met them, I suppose it was at some bar."

In that moment, The Screamers hadn't played a single concert, and they hadn't recorded even one song (something that would not change in their brief career: possibly the most influential group in history without a single record published), but their look was perfect: They dressed in ripped t-shirts, torn jeans, with their hair sticking up as if they had stuck their fingers in electrical sockets. They were punks without any ambivalence. They fit perfectly with the idea they had for *Slash.*

The band was led by Tommy Gear and Tomata du Plenty, who had arrived in LA from Seattle looking for success and leaving behind their previous and failed project, The Tupperwares. This all went down the drain after losing a judgement with the well-known container brand that accused them of using their name illicitly. Like any good group looking to make a go of it, they had emigrated to the great city of opportunities and moved in together in the same house in Hollywood, the Wilton Hilton.

Musically, they distinguished themselves from any other band of the era: they didn't have a guitarist, and in its place, they played super-saturated rudimentary keyboards, that gave them an air between the crude and the futuristic. They were special: they weren't just a copy of what was going on in England. The recently formed staff at *Slash* decided that they would dedicate themselves first and foremost to photojournalism.

In this first photo-session for *Slash*, Melanie photographed The Screamers burning things thrown on the floor and giving defiant looks. "Melanie really defined much of the punk look, with very dynamic images," Kerry Colonna recalls, photographer and good friend of Philly and Claude (Throughout her career, Melanie Nissen has photographed various rock celebrities: Lenny Kravitz, Iggy Pop, Chris Isaak…).

A spaghetti fight that ended with Claude (dark jacket), members of The Screamers (on the floor), Trudie—punk celebrity from LA—John Denney, of The Weirdos, thrown on the floors. (Photograph: Philomena Winstanley)

The police interrupt The Weirdos' concert during *Slash's* first benefit show (*Slash,* volume 1, number 3, August of 1977)

At the same time, the four friends debuted as interviewers, with Claude and Samiof taking the lead, though with more passion than journalistic rigor. Normally, they talked about everyday topics like television, drunkenness or junk food, more than they did about supposedly transcendent questions (that today the music press loves so much…).

To lead this first report on The Screamers, Claude wrote an opening in which he already showed off his ironic and provocative tone that ended up defining *Slash's* style: "Still don't know who we're talking about, do you? Relax, neither does the rest of the world … but they ARE the future, and the

whole deranged SLASH staff would rather sober up for the rest of their lives than ignore new musical directions!"

Kickboy wasn't wrong about anything: in the upcoming months The Screamers turned into the talk of the town, and shortly thereafter, Iggy Pop—conscious or not of paraphrasing Claude's words, defined them as "the leaders of the future."

On May 1st, 1977, the first issue of *Slash* hit the streets: 20 pages in black and white, on thin paper, with the singer from The Damned, Dave Vanian, on the cover. "Claude brought the first edition of *Slash* to Al's Kitchen, to show it to us," recounts Julie Stone, his friend and coworker.

If anybody had told these four friends that, forty years later, collectors would pay more than 100 dollars for a copy of that first issue of *Slash* they probably would have burst out laughing.

The founding editorial team for *Slash:* Philomena, Claude, Steve Samiof and Melanie Nissen, during the first benefit concert for the magazine (1977). Photograph: Hat & Beard

First issue of *Slash* (May, 1977)

Collage of Bleu Leach for the first issue of *Slash* (May, 1977)

The Weirdos in the third issue of *Slash* (August, 1977)

Nina Hagen posing for Philly close to the apartment where the couple lived (Photograph: Philomena Winstanley)

CHAPTER 4

NO ELVIS, BEATLES OR ROLLING STONES IN 1977!

'Cause the days change at night

Change in an instant

The days change at night

Change in an instant

“Los Angeles,” X

Announcement and notice from Claude “Kickboy Face” that was usually published in *Slash*

SO THIS IS WAR, EH?

This decade’s biggest musical fad has been the dreadful dripping sounds of disco music. Up to now. Because lately there’ve been rumors of strange goings-on on the fringes of the music world. Violence at concerts both on the part of the performers and of the audience, outraged editorials in daily newspapers, foul-mouthed interviews on live TV and frightened record companies dropping contracts faster than a chimp would a hot potato, oddball fashions of slashed clothing, repulsive make-up and bondage paraphanalia (sic), and of course music, dirty primitive music that has little to do with the stuff music stations have been pouring in our ears for what seems to be an eternity.

Today this madness is mostly an English phenomenon, but there are signs that it will not stop there. This publication was born out of curiosity and out of hope. Curiosity regarding what looks like a possible rebirth of true rebel music, hope in its eventual victory over the bland products professional pop stars have been feeding us. May the punks set this rat-infested industry on fire. It sure could use a little brightness!

So there will be no objective reviewing in these pages, and definitely no unnecessary dwelling upon the bastards who’ve been boring the living shit out of us for years with their concept albums, their cosmic discoveries and their pseudo-philosophical inanities. Enough is enough, partner! About time we squeezed the pus out and sent the filthy rich old farts of rock ‘n’ roll to retirement homes in Florida where they belong. Let them play at Saturday night dances for the mink and Geritol crowd at the Sheraton hotels, let them remember the old days when they’d rather die than be seen with socialite creeps and being heard talking trash and then let them shit in their pants with envy. As the Clash say, NO ELVIS, BEATLES OR ROLLING STONES IN 1977!

Editorial from Kickboy Face in the first volume of *Slash*

Poster published in *Slash* volume 12 (August, 1978)

This provocative and acidic text of Kickboy Face appears at the very opening of the first volume of *Slash*. Like something out of a vanguardist manifesto from the beginning of the twentieth century, it was the spark that lit the flames of the LA punk scene. More kids than Claude could imagine felt exactly the same as he did: tired of disco music, progressive rock, and the generalized pretentiousness in the music world. Intentionally or not, the play worked: as soon as he appealed to a community that didn’t exist, he left clear evidence for the need to create one. For many punks that felt alone in their species, it was a reference point. There were other people like them. “*Slash* somehow organized the scene and made it reality,” remembers Matt Groening, the famous creator of *The Simpsons,* who was at that time an intern with a local newspaper and went to punk shows in LA. “Many youngsters wanted to be part of *Slash,”* Philly points out.

Samiof himself took care of distribution. With his old Dodge, he dropped off the 5000 copies that they printed of this first issue at stores and kiosks around the city. It paid off immediately: “In a few days, they started calling from newspapers like The New York Times or Los Angeles Times asking who the hell we were. We were kind of freaked out,” Samiof remembers. In two weeks, they sold 3000 copies. The war that Kickboy Face was talking about had begun.

Soon they started getting dozens of letters from readers, who wrote about their favorite groups, asking questions or criticizing them (even Matt Groening sent some). Most of the punks were young, and it didn't sit well with some of them that the people working at *Slash* were almost 30. "One girl used to joke about the fact that I had a beard. She thought it made me look like too much of a hippie," Samiof says.

The face of Dave Vanian, vocalist of The Damned appears on the cover of this first issue. Samiof, Claude, Philly and Melanie had interviewed the London-based band on their first visit to the USA, an encounter that ended up awfully bitter: "It was terrible because they behaved like some honest-to-God dicks," Claude would recount sometime later.

Interview with The Bags (*Slash,* Volume 5, October 1977)

Photograph of Blue Leach (*Slash,* Volume 2, June 1977)

Kickboy Face signed almost all the articles in this volume, even though this would change quickly because of the warm welcome the magazine received. In a few months, they could even select their collaborators. "It was impressive how well some kids wrote, kids who got close to us," recounts Samiof.

To present *Slash,* they organized a party at Samiof's house. 300 invitees showed up, squeezed together like a can of sardines. "The first idea was for Devo to play, but that wasn't possible," said the host. Instead of this band, whose members would become millionaires with their eccentric rock, The Screamers played, which was a logical choice, keeping in mind that the magazine was betting big on their success.

For many in attendance, that concert was a revelation. "It was radical and risky, something totally new," says the saxophonist Andy Seven, who was present at the concert featuring The Screamers. For Philly it was "a joyful concert." Claude, for his part, would remember it as "an art party" (at first, the LA punk scene had more artistic aims than the rebellious ones that it would assume later). Among the public, there were a few kids who just formed or were about to form their first bands: The Bags, The Germs, The Zeros… "It would be easier to say who wasn't at that party," Samiof concludes. In a few years, it would turn into one of those historic dates remembered by more people than those who were actually there for it.

The emergence of *Slash* coincided with another very important event for punk rock in Los Angeles. The Masque, an enormous, abandoned building in Hollywood that was repurposed as a concert and rehearsal venue, would open its doors that same summer of 1977, ready to receive the first punks of the city.

This concrete block—full of hallways and stairs leading to nowhere (formerly the property of the legendary filmmaker Cecile B DeMille)—was rented to Brendan Mullen, a half-Scottish, half-Irish go-getter who, like many, had arrived in Los Angeles looking for adventures. His aspirations, the same as the gang at *Slash*, weren't exactly about making money. "I was only looking for a place to be with my new colleagues in LA, other blockheads like myself," he would say about it later. Sarcastically, he would also explain how he set up the place: "I paid a bunch of gay prostitutes, drunk and unemployed … to take out the two or three tons of junk that was inside."

Brendan Mullen (Photograph: Gary Leonard)

Attendees of the first party organized by Slash in May 1977 (Slash, Volume 2)

Photographs: Melanie/Steve

Notice included in the special first anniversary volume of *Slash* (1978)

Mullen sublet the rooms as rehearsal spaces and turned the garage into a music hall. Claude fell in love with this space the first time he saw it. It was perfect for all the bands he wrote about in *Slash* to play in: dark, no stage (the groups placed face to face with the public), no neighbors outside who could bother or interfere with what would happen inside.

Right away, a close friendship emerged between Claude and Mullen; which made sense considering that they were both expats, passionate about music and oppositional towards authority. Philly remembers this character affectionately, who served as midwife for the LA punk scene: "he was a good guy. He didn't accept me much because I was English, and he was half Irish, half Scotch; I had destroyed his people. But when Claude died, he surprised me because he was very mindful of me. 'Ask me for anything,' he told me. He really did love me," she recalls about Mullen, who passed away in 2009 from a heart attack.

In a few weeks, The Masque filled up with punks from different neighborhoods in LA, who came to rehearse, see shows or just be there to party, without anybody who could bother them about their looks. "It was an incredible sensation like something was happening, with that surprising mix of people with so many distinctly different social backgrounds. Claude Bessy was completely different from Belinda Carlisle (member of Germs, The Go-go's and successful solo singer). Although we didn't have much to do with each other, we were together because we didn't have any other place to go," remembers Exene Cervenka, from X, a band that quickly stood out in that first wave of punks and played at The Masque a few weeks after opening.

Steve Borders, a dive bar with dirt-cheap drinks, stood in front of the Masque, where the gang from *Slash* would often go before concerts. "Usually four or five groups would play each night, and we usually missed the first that played because we were still at the bar," Samiof remembers. Inside of the venue, there was no bar, so people would usually stick bottles in paper bags to continue the party inside.

In a few months, an underground punk scene had formed in Los Angeles. The war had started, and there was no turning back.

Some female attendees of the Punk Rock Horror Show in the Hollywood Palladium (*Slash,* volume 5, October 1977). Photographs: Jenny Lens

The Masque (Photograph: John Brian King)

Nervous Gender (Photograph: Philomena Winstanley)

Cassette with a recording of the Germs sent to *Slash.* This and other cassettes of Claude's were in the box that reached the author's hands together with Philly's photography collection

Claude met with Pete Shelley of Buzzcocks one afternoon in December of 1979. In the interview, published in *Slash* (in the January/February edition from 1980), they talked about the intense work pace of the group and about the British music press. The interviewee mentions that he just met a man by the name of Tony Wilson, who "does whatever he wants on his show *So it Goes*." The 80s were about to

arrive, and this Tony Wilson still hadn't left his mark on independent British rock with his label Factory Records. On this occasion, Claude also took care of taking the photos. Shelley passed away on December 6th, 2018, while we were working on this edition of this book

CHAPTER 5

A DEAD BODY IN A BLOODY BATHTUB

Rip them down

Hold me up

Tell them that

I'm your gun

Pull my trigger

I am bigger than

"Forming," Germs

Still from *The Decline of Western Civilization* (Penelope Spheeris)

The first LA punks barely got any recognition from the rock establishment. Not even in the Los Angeles press, Mecca of communications, were they well received, as Claude would recount: "The newspapers ignored us completely. People were very aggressive with us. Even the most stoned hippies would attack us physically, and the people from the press and the record labels were triumphant hippies, were very hostile towards us." [sic]

The music industry looked at *Slash* with skepticism. "Melanie had some contacts in the big record labels, because of her job as a photographer, and from the start they were interested in putting publicity in the magazine. But as soon as they saw that we were playing their game, they backed off," Samiof explains on her behalf. Philly is the most graphic in remembering it: "those types pick up the fanzine with the tips of their fingers, like it grossed them out." Perhaps, the record label executives weren't too fond of paying for a page to advertise one of their groups, only to have Kickboy publish a scathing review right next to it…

This isolation or contempt, nevertheless, only strengthened the punks. Whoever got close to the scene did it because they had a real interest, not because it was fashionable (as could happen in London, for example). That way it became a small community, united in that creative freedom would prevail over any ambitions of success. "If nobody is going to pay attention to us, let's at least do what we want," those punks should have thought, who years later would become more influential than what many imagined they could be (just ask Beck, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, or Nirvana, among a long list of famous bands influenced by that wave).

Slash was at the epicenter of all that. "What *Slash* said was important, it took itself seriously. There were other fanzines, but they were made by kids at home with copy machines. In *Slash*, you saw that those who wrote had more fundamentals and were more professional," remembers Alice Bag, founder of The Bags, one of the first punk bands of Los Angeles.

Advertisement from Dangerhouse published in *Slash* (volume 2, number 3, January 1979).

While at first *Slash* couldn't find any punks, soon they found themselves at the other extreme: they could be very selective of whom they would publish. They expanded the number of pages (the third issue went out with ten more pages than the first issue) and started to count on more collaborators to write and take pictures. Kerry Colonna, a friend of Philly and Claude who years earlier had photographed Jim Morisson and the Manson Family, among others, joined the growing list of *Slash's* contributors: "I never used flash, to distinguish myself from the typical rock photos and because I didn't have enough money for much equipment," she recalls about those rudimentary works that defined a whole aesthetic. She set out to make virtues out of limitations.

Kerry Colonna was also the person who showed Philly how to use her Fujica camera that Claude had gifted her. "I remember showing her the technically demanding part of developing pictures, though she quickly developed her own way to work," this good friend remembers. And, that's how it went.

Philly debuted as a photographer for *Slash* in style: for the fourth volume she took the cover photo, in which Kerry appears playing dead in a bathtub. "It occurred to her that I should show up looking like a dead hippie, with the word *Slash* scratched on my bloody chest with part of my torso covered in the numbers of previous issues of the magazine," Kerry Colonna recounts.

Shock playing at Whisky a Go Go. Kickboy Face criticized this band, calling them long-haired guys who turned themselves into punks by "taking themselves too seriously." The leather jackets, like the ones the Ramones wore, ended up being their identifying signifier (Photograph: Philomena Winstanley).

Darby Crash together with their famous tarantula in *The Decline of Western Civilization* (Penelope Spheeris, 1981)

"She hired a special effects makeup artist to make the deep, bloody cuts. She gave me quite a few directions so I would pose like a dead body," she recalls.

Philly took it upon herself to take most of the photos for *Slash,* in such an uncomfortable environment to photograph such as a punk rock concert. "I would put myself to the side of the stage, making sure that nobody would push me or that I would fall onto the floor with my camera," she remembers. The first live concert she covered for *Slash* was The Zeros', a group of teens from San Diego, a city 200 kilometers to the south of Los Angeles, who were always closely linked to the LA punk scene.

In the following months after the arrival of *Slash*, the first records of LA punk bands were published. They came out as singles: the small labels that put them out didn't have budgets for albums, which were more expensive to press (and on the other hand, the bands may not have had enough songs to fill the time on an LP). The most emblematic group from this first wave was Germs, liberated by Darby Crash, an intelligent, manipulative and self-destructive type, who created a small legion of adepts, ready to follow in his footsteps through any danger, baptizing the cult of dysfunctional adolescents as "The Circle."

Philly remembers this extreme character with both affection and with a certain level of distance: "He was brilliant, you could tell from talking to him alone. He had a tarantula that he would bring with him wherever he went. He and his friends burnt circles on their arms with cigarettes, to show that they were in the gang," a somewhat particular gang, as she explains in more detail: "They were good kids, although they took a lot of drugs in that band," she says about this formation in which guitarist Pat Smear also played, who, years later would fill stadiums as part of Nirvana and Foo Fighters.

Colonna playing dead and photographed by Philly. Cover of issue 4 of *Slash* (September 1977)

First concert photo taken by Philly and published in *Slash:* The Zeros, from San Diego, playing at Straighta Head Sounds

Kickboy fell in love with Germs: "It's about one of the most amazing songs I've ever heard. They carry monotony to levels never before seen and push the absurd to limits that no other group has ever achieved … It's music for crazies, very obscure, but inexplicably brilliant," he wrote in *Slash* about their first single, *Forming* (1977). A record that, effectively, sounds provocatively monotonous, like nothing recorded since then. So much so that the workers at the plant where it was pressed left a written note with the pressing of 500 examples that they had left with the band: "Caution: this record produces ear cancer," it said.

Kickboy Face saw how genuine the band was long before they would become legends of the California punk scene, when most people wouldn't take them seriously. His persona is so associated with his history, that the character of Kickboy even shows up in the movie *What We Do Is Secret* (2007), played by actor Sebastian Roché. The movie recounts the intense trip of the Germs, marked by heroin,

suicide, and unfortunate coincidences, and in it we see an exalted Kickboy, interviewing the group at their first concert or at the recording studio with the band.

But not all punks from Los Angeles were so nihilistic and self-destructive. While Philly and Claude prudently kept Germs at arm's length, they got much closer to other bands. "Most of all, we were friends with The Bags, The Weirdos and X," our protagonist recalls.

The Bags played fast, had provocative lyrics and –most unusually back then—they had two girls up front: Alicia Armendariz and Patricia Morrison, best known as Alice Bag and Patricia Bag. They had become friends at a casting call to enter a supergroup (these things happened in LA) and found their place giving honor to their name (Las Bolas), they performed concerts covering their heads with paper bags.

"In that scene it wasn't about money or genre or even differences. All those things that separated everyone else, they bound us. We were like a family," remembers Alice Bag, singer of the group, about that stage of search and expansion. Her role was very important in giving a voice to girls in a style that was—above all else, in those early days—predominantly masculine.

Kickboy Face always felt sympathy for The Bags. "It's as if you had a blinding and chaotic vision on a planet from the future," he wrote in Slash about one of their concerts. Alice, for her part, remembers Philly and Claude fondly. "Most importantly I remember a time that I woke up in their apartment, after spending the whole night drinking with them. They made breakfast for me, took care of me, and I felt protected. You could tell that they were a little older than most of the punks," she explains. It stood out to her about Claude that "he was a very intelligent person, who could knock you over with two sentences;" she has an equally vivid memory about Philly that places great importance on her place in the first Angeleno punk scene: "She was a very loved person; only the people inside of the scene knew how important she was for that whole movement," she stresses.

A photo of a very young Sonic Youth playing at Brighton Beach on November 8th, 1985 (Festival Blood on Brighton Beach). Philly isn't 100% sure that she took the picture: "I don't recall developing this one," she says, though she does appear among the public in a video from this show.

Patricia Morrison and Alice Bag of The Bags (Photograph: Philomena Winstanley)

X in *Slash* (Volume 1, number 6, December 1977)

With the Weirdos, other pioneers of Californian punk, their relationship also went beyond their job with *Slash.* They became great friends. "They were the second group of punks that we met. We got along right away." The Weirdos were some boys from art school, with a carefully crafted aesthetic (painted pants, stamped shirts…), and they played with greater ease than most other punks from their environment. Like so many, they took in English punk but fused it with something genuinely Californian. "I had the theory that punk music from New York was arty, from London it was political, and from Los Angeles it was pop. I devoured pop culture: from TV, from the absurd… The Weirdos confirmed this theory. They had great songs, a bold image, and an excellent singer," Greg Shaw, creator of Bomp! Records, a key record label in that scene, would explain years later. He passed away in 2004.

The influence of The Weirdos on subsequent Californian Punk music is clear, and if it doesn't seem like it, go ask those millionaires in Green Day.

The friendship with The Weirdos brought with it a substantial change to Philly's life. "I bought a car from their singer, a '61 Plymouth Valiant Automatic, that I got for $200," she recounts. That's how her interminable commutes to work on public transport came to an end. "There were few cars like that one. It drew attention. One time, driving on the highway, a trucker shouted at me 'take care of that car. It's one of the best," Philomena remembers.

They also had a lot of good times with John Doe and Exene Cervenka, bassist and singer from X. In sole contrast from the other bands, this group was respected by the rock music press. "They were lucid people," recalls Philly. The admiration was mutual: "If it hadn't been for *Slash* and other fanzines, or for Kristine McKenna who wrote for the LA Times, the scene never would have turned into what it became," Doe says for his part.

X broke from much of what was supposedly punk rock: their guitarist, Billy Zoom, was reliable if not a virtuoso. He would let off blues and country riffs in his songs, and Exene's lyrics were poems.

During the year following *Slash's* debut, dozens of punk bands burst out onto Los Angeles: The Dils, F-Word, Deadbeats, The Plugz, The Go-Go's… Some were good, others, normal, and the worst -although some collectors may deny it -were tremendously bad. This was an underground that kept growing, feeding back into itself and creating its own heroes.

Darby Crash and other members of Germs and The Circle on volume 3 of *Slash,* August 1977 (Photograph: Jenny Stern)

Jacqui Ham from Ut, pioneer no-wave group from New York, photographed by Philomena. The band was founded in 1978, in New York, and three years later moved to London, to make a niche for itself in the independent scene. The trio did tours with The Fall and counted on tremendous support from the emblematic and deceased presenter John Peel. Sonic Youth cite Ut as one of their primary influences for their sound (Photograph: Philomena Winstanley)

CHAPTER 6

ALL THE RAGE ABOUT BLONDIE, AND A NIGHT IN THE DRUNK TANK

I can't get out

I'm stuck inside

I have to shout

There's no place to hide

I'm stuck in my brain

It's all in my mind

I'm in myself so

There's nothing to find

I'm in, I'm in, I'm in

Solitary confinement

"Solitary Confinement," The Weirdos

For someone who loves a good time like Claude, the arrival of Punk was like being a child getting lost in an amusement park. During those first years with Philly, before punk rock, he had left his excesses behind, all the hustle and bustle of music- alcohol and drugs were too tempting to *not* get himself carried away.

"Before starting *Slash* he was a person you couldn't slow down, but not anymore," she recalls. Her boyfriend, she points out, had two distinct faces: Claude, a calm guy, with whom she would spend hours talking about books or just reading in silence, each one in their own corner, and Kickboy, the hedonist and scandalous agitator, with whom things got out of hand and who was an underground icon.

"Everyone wanted to be his friend because he had a great vibe," remembers Alice Bag. With *Slash,* Claude turned into someone influential. He created a whole character. The youngsters knew that Uncle Claude, how some referred to him, on top of being a good guy, enjoyed letting loose and pushing things to the limit.

Claude's mischief didn't always end well. One night it led him to a jail cell, while his girlfriend thought that he was out on a binge with Blondie, who were in the city. Many punks were going to go with them to a house party," Philly remembers.

The next day, it took a while for everything to become clear: "That morning, Claude called me and since I thought he was keeping the party going, I hung up on him. This happened again once or twice more because I was upset, I thought he had left me hung out to dry, until he told me: "I'm in jail, come look for me." He had spent the night in the *drunk tank*. "He came home bruised up because they had hit him," she recalls.

It wasn’t out of the ordinary for the police to come and break up a party with their fists. The forces of order have never been too kind to punks, but the LA police was extraordinarily authoritarian, if not violent, against the punks. “They would come in armed and intolerant. A pair of friends were beaten up in front of me and had to go to the hospital to get stitched up,” recalls Alice Bag.

Larchmont Hall in 1977 (Photograph: Bruce Torrence Collection)

This refusal didn’t stop the punks from looking for new places to meet up. The Masque had to close 8 months after opening, due to a lack of the proper licenses necessary to host concerts, so Slash started organizing them at Larchmont Hall, an old locale in the center of Los Angeles, maintained by retired people. The police didn’t hesitate to set foot there. Javier Escovedo, singer and guitarist of The Zeros, remembers, as he lived it firsthand at a performance with his band: “Just as we started our concert, the audience began pogo dancing, and the older folks thought this was the start of a fight or something, so they called the cops. They told us that we should cut the performance, but we didn’t pay them any mind,” he recounts. The performance ended with agents glaring at us, for what would happen.

The police weren't just hostile with the punks, they could be the same way with young fans of the music, like what you could always sense in the parking lot of the Whisky a Go Go, the emblematic concert hall that saw the birth of The Doors and was turf for the rockers. These didn’t take kindly to seeing the parking lot fill itself with kids with dyed hair (“It seems that this parking lot was the place to be seen between shows,” Kickboy wrote in *slash*).

“The atmosphere at the parking lot of the Whisky could be a little sordid. We weren’t that big of a group of friends, and people didn’t tend to give us much sympathy,” Philly says. Outside of the circle you had to walk with one eye open. “Once, returning home with Claude, some guys who were driving a pickup truck started insulting us because we had our hair dyed red,” she says. Things got worse: “They followed us trying to hit us with their truck. We had to leave running to escape,” she details.

Punks at that parking lot talked about music, showed off their best clothes, (usually put together by themselves) and drank whatever was on hand. Concerning chemicals, they mostly took Quaaludes, a cheap analgesic that was sold in pharmacies and mixed with alcohol to produce a euphoria. “I wouldn’t usually do it, but sometimes, if somebody offered it to me, it was like, ‘okay, yeah, sure,’ and then I’d start talking to everyone. Although if you mixed it with alcohol, like I did sometimes, the combination could be fatal,” Philly recalls.

Kickboy Face, on the other hand, wasn’t about to just spend the night chatting it up. Often he would end up getting wasted. “There were times when the kids would follow him around offering him things, when he was already almost on the floor. They would tell me: ‘but give him something to wake him up,” and I would think: ‘Of course, since they’re not the ones who have to carry him home…,’” Philly says. That something could be cocaine or crystal meth, although that wasn’t the most common. “We took whatever was around, but we didn’t have a lot of cash, so there wasn’t usually any cocaine,” Samiof remembers for his part.

Though there was one boundary that Kickboy never crossed. “He never tried heroin because he said it was death, and he wanted to live. He was invited to parties where people were taking it, but he never went,” Philly emphasizes. Many punks, on the other hand, were much less cautious and got hooked. People started dying from overdoses. Many got stuck in a lifestyle where they had to get money,

and that brought on a ton of serious problems with robbery and dealing with people who sold the drug…"

She even flirted with the substance: "My best friend was addicted and gave me little gifts of heroin. It was very tempting because we got along very well, but I didn't want to get carried away with something I didn't really want to do," she says. In her friend's case, heroin was the reason why she ended up distancing herself from the Hollywood punk scene and returned to her studies to become a professor.

An outside look of the legendary Whisky a Go Go in 1979 (Photograph: Medium)

Nervous Gender (Photograph: Philomena Winstanley)

In a city without hardly any punk dives –and where the few there were, were closed—it was logical for house parties to turn into the best way to keep the night going (and most being in an environment of mostly single family houses, without neighbors packed wall to wall). Samiof Remembers it: "You would always end up thrown on the floor of someone's house. I hate comparing it to the hippy community, but for me there was a similar spirit: Everyone knew each other, we went out together, and we shared beers."

Kerry Colonna also remembers these nights, especially because Kickboy could be so unpredictable: "On more than one occasion, as soon as the bar would close, Claude would approach a microphone to announce to everyone that 'The party will continue at Kerry's house!' He would then proceed to give everyone my address without asking me. Afterwards, tons of people would show up, and at my apartment, you couldn't even get in, and those who stayed outside would draw even more attention from passersby, until I would lose count of all the strangers there," she recalls. As surprising as it seems, these massive impromptu afterparties normally didn't result in any vandalism or robberies: "Darby Crash, from the Germs, tried to leave with a WWII pilot jacket that I had, but at the last minute, he hung it outside of my bedroom window," Colonna gratefully remembers.

Others hold onto less pleasant memories of these benders. "The whole thing consisted of going to three or four house parties throughout the whole night, something that seemed like the most boring thing to me in the world," recalls Graham Lewis, bassist for the London-based band Wire, about his first time out in Los Angeles, on a trip with his group. It had all the makings of a very forgettable evening, until it took a big, unexpected turn into a night he could never forget for the rest of life.

"At the last of the night's parties, I heard a voice speaking very loudly over everyone else, with slurred speech and a weird French accent," Graham Lewis remembers. It was Kickboy Face in action. They started talking, and the chat quickly turned into an enlightening conversation: "I was telling him that punk for me was completely dead. It was the summer of 78 and in London, it had already become a cliché. I told him that my group didn't have anything to do with that, and that what I liked the most was the album *Low,* by Bowie. He went into quite the fit of rage," he recounts.

Neither Kickboy nor he could imagine that that would be the beginning of a close friendship.

The Ramones at the Whisky a Go Go (August 10, 1977)

The Zeroes (Photograph: Philomena Winstanley)

CHAPTER 7

SOME CHEAP VACATIONS IN THE MISERY OF OTHERS

I don't want to holiday in the sun

I want to go to the new Belsen

I want to see some history

Cause now I've got a reasonable economy

"Holidays in the Sun," Sex Pistols

Ut (Photographs: Philomena Winstanley)

The Weirdos, X, Germs and other bands with cult followings in Los Angeles went practically unheard of in London and New York, the meccas of punk in the 70s. "There was a lot of chauvinism in British punk music in the 70s. The same happened in New York, in the scene that revolved around the CBGB (locale where the Ramones, Television, and Blondie first appeared)," recalls Jon Savage, reputed English journalist, author of numerous well-known books about youth subcultures.

However, *Slash* hit it off with a small group of followers in London. "It sold in Rough Trade. I don't believe it was easy to buy in many other places," explains Savage, referring to this emblematic record store in London. He was once a very young journalist who, very differently from his colleagues, actually saw something genuine in the California punks: "On those records you heard a swing that I liked a lot. *Forming*, by the Germs, seemed like a masterpiece to me," he insists.

Jon Savage didn't waste any time getting in contact with the LA scene and, in particular, with Claude. "I had a fanzine and exchanged with others who had their own. Obviously, I paid attention to *Slash*, so Claude and I started to become good friends," he recalls. Only a few months after meeting each other, Savage travelled to Los Angeles to meet the groups he was writing about in person: "Claude showed me around the local scene. He picked me up in a car, and the first thing he did was take me to Hollywood to meet The Screamers," the writer says, and he recalls: "I believe Claude and I both happened to agree that punk rock was something international."

Certainly, Claude had a global and open perception about music. Little by little, he tightened the bonds between punk leaders from other places, primarily in England (something that was much harder in a world without the internet than it is now). Just as much as he was an enthusiast of the Los Angeles scene, he also paid attention and supported the bands that visited the city. Many British punks disowned any American influence on their music, but at the end of the day, they still had to conquer America. Many tried it, but only few achieved it.

Los Angeles is a mandatory stop on any band's American tour, but the Sex Pistols weren't just any other band. In their only controversial tour to the other side of the pond, they didn't perform there or in New York, or in any other place that was relevant to the American music industry. Instead, they travelled through the south of the country, in an itinerary that took them through medium-sized cities that were conservative and hostile towards them. *Slash* made a report about the legendary tour. "Some cheap Vacations in the Misery of Others."

It was Claude's turn to report on the show in San Francisco, the last stop on this tour that ended up being the last concert the Sex Pistols ever played (without counting later reunions). Philly and Claude, together with some friends, flew from LA to go to the historic event. For a moment, they thought that they wouldn't make it: "There was a lot of turbulence. We asked for some champaign, and it fell all over everyone. It looked like we wouldn't land," Philomena remembers.

In San Francisco, Sex Pistols played for five thousand people, the largest crowd they had ever had. Kickboy wrote for *Slash* a very detailed chronicle: "And Steve, Paul, Sid and Johnny were there. In the end, it was something real, with an air that only Sex Pistols have. Very vulnerable, but also with that something extra. When I find out what it is, I'll retire. It's one of those mysteries I will always return to ponder. Some people have it, and others do not," he wrote.

Kerry Colonna, who also travelled to San Francisco and took photos of the legendary performance for *Slash*, remembers it in illuminating detail: "In one photo that I took from behind the stage, you can see the first rows that were full above all with LA punks. Sid played with gauze wrapped around his arm because, as they told me, he wanted to get his fix before the concert, but he couldn't find his kit to shoot up heroin and decided to open up a vein with a fork to mix the drug directly into his blood."

After the performance, the gang from *Slash* managed to get into the group's dressing room, as Kickboy's chronicle recounts: "The party in the dressing room was no fun. I swear it's got to be easier to get into the Rolling Stones' dressing room than to get a passing glance at these people. Vicious threw a beer at a few onlookers, who were enchanted. And Rotten passed through there, like a shadow hunched over[…] somewhere deep down, Rotten was thinking about his next plans," the article concludes.

Sex Pistols photographed by Philly. "I had to develop the photo many times until it finally came out how I wanted it. It was difficult because of all the white," she says.

After the concert, the four *Pistols* each went their own way, thus ending a brief and intense episode in rock history.

With other bands that visited on tour, the link was much more one-on-one. Many were even received in Philly and Claude's house to take pictures and do interviews. "One day Claude said: 'And why do we have to go out to interview the groups? Let them come here to our home,'" she remembers. It was a good deal: they offered sun and beach (highly valued by anyone from England, of whom most of their invitees were), and, for a change, they wouldn't have to get up and go to whatever hotel the musicians were staying at. That's how they avoided waiting for 20 other journalists to finish their questions, having the manager supervising them, or any other habitual music industry practice. With the musicians happy, in a relaxed and different setting, the interviews ended up better, and most unexpected situations would occur.

A good example of this was the time Nina Hagen visited their apartment, before this German singer had become the histrionic icon of the 80s. Without hardly any introduction, she showed Philly her breasts. "She said: 'I'm only going to show my breasts to you,' then she ripped open her t-shirt to take them out," the photographer recounts. This German was successful in Europe, but barely known in the United States. And maybe for that very reason, she didn't have any problem flashing somebody in the plain light of day, in the middle of the beach.

While responding to Kickboy's questions, Hagen was equally uninhibited. "When I took LSD for the first time in East Berlin, I met an angel, to whom I asked many questions before he disappeared. HE gave me the same answers that I later found in books," she recalled, referring to the Bible. Claude, no friend of religion, maintained a distant and respectful position.

Nina Hagen wasn't the only 80s icon who visited the couple's apartment. On that same sandy beach Philly photographed Madness, authors of "Our House," one of the most widely sung songs in the 80s. Though, when *Slash* took them in on their first American tour, they weren't very famous, and they acted like some hooligans who had never left their hometown before. "With the cockney accent that they have, it seems that they are going to melt the circuits of the recorder," wrote Kickboy about these London boys, who at the end of the 70s put ska music on the map, Jamaican music that he loved just as much as reggae.

Not only was Philly tasked with transcribing their closed, London accent from the interview, she was also put in physical danger photographing the group: "The guys from the band had the idea to write 'Madness' in the sand so I could take a picture of them from above. I got on their managers shoulders and the whole time it seemed as though I was going to fall. They wouldn't stop laughing," she recalls about the beach photo. The couple's apartment is visible in the background.

Madness (Photograph: Philomena Winstanley)

First benefit concert for *Slash* with a performance by The Screamers

In some cases, the culture clash became very clear; like when they met The Fall, a cult band from Manchester: "They were boys from the north of England, who had never tried anything but sausages and beans," joked Philly. Kickboy felt a strong attachment to this group, led by the departed Mark E. Smith, a guy as biting as him. "The Fall has an unusual trick: honesty. They have published two incredible albums in Great Britain (the first is about to come out here, with a few changes in respect to the first pressing), but their music doesn't appear to be noteworthy or to have enough hooks for the narcissists at *Wet* magazine [at the time, an influential publication about trends in Los Angeles], who are themselves the walking dead, to talk about them," he wrote. The sarcastic postpunk and unfriendliness of The Fall didn't make them an easy sell to the Californian public.

Other musicians jumped right into their swimsuits as soon as they found Philly and Claude on the beach; like Steve Jones, the guitarist from Sex Pistols, who visited them when their popular band had just broken up. "Composing is easy, but lyrics are altogether different. That was something Rotten was good at," Kickboy said about the singer of their recently separated group. When the moment came to talk about disagreements with their old companions, he didn't hold anything back: "If [Rotten] hadn't left, the whole thing would've taken off […]. Although he's an asshole, I would've put up with him […]. I don't know what he'll be up to now. I hope he isn't a big enough dickhead to start doing reggae," he responded.

Jones should have chosen his words more carefully about his ex-bandmate because reggae was exactly what Rotten had up his sleeves next. Although, as is customary for the provocative and lucid singer, he made it his own thing. A few months after leaving Sex Pistols, and rebaptized artistically as John Lydon (his birthname), he presented to society his new group: Public Image Ltd., abbreviated as PiL.

It mixed Jamaican sounds with experimental rock and an avant-garde spirit, a combination that quickly earned him credit with specialized critics in Britain, and of course, with Claude as well.

Of all the visits to the couple's apartment, his was especially important for Philly and Claude, now that both felt a great respect towards the vocalist. This visit happened in Los Angeles during a promotion for PiL. He made time to meet with *Slash.*

Lydon arrived at their apartment, and they received him with tea and beers. Philly looks back on this special moment: "I remember that above all else he was a gentleman," she says. And so she depicted him: with a much more relaxed posture than the habitual burlesque and defiant poses one associates with this musician [pp. 20, 23 and 26].

"I had the same exact record player. It cost you 100 dollars? Well, they scammed you," Lydon let loose on Claude at the very beginning of the interview. Throughout the nearly two-hour interview, they talked about reggae, the record industry and more metaphysical questions, like the true meaning of punk. Claude won over the interviewee, so much so that Lydon congratulated him: "he was an intelligent guy," Philly notes about Lydon. It became even clearer to her when she started transcribing the conversation: differently from so many other interviewees, he didn't hesitate or leave any phrases hanging in the air. "I usually transcribed everything, including the eh's and the pauses, but with him, there weren't any," she details. Decades later, the photos she took of Lydon are the ones she feels most proud of.

Punk had stirred everything up. On both sides of the Atlantic, new bands emerged, with innovative sounds and discourses. Without trying, *Slash* had turned into a platform for many of them. The magazine took off. "We thought we would be like *Rolling Stone,* Philly confesses. Nevertheless, it didn't end up like that.

John Waters interviewed in *Slash* (volume 2, number 4, March 1979)

Jello Biafra in one of the first Dead Kennedys' performances in Los Angeles. On one occasion that we went to San Francisco, we spent the night at their house," recounts Philly (Photograph: Philomena Winstanley)

Havoc and destruction at a Bags concert provoked by an encounter between the band and Tom Waits, who was among the audience (*Slash,* volume 1, number 9, April 1978)

CHAPTER 8

WHO OWNS THE GOOSE THAT LAYS THE GOLDEN EGG?

Sitting in a room

Surrounded by bottles

My friends have all left

And my head is on fire

It's already morning

But pieces of the night

Are stick-tuck to my hair

What we did is fading

"Underground Babylon", Catholic Discipline

Two years after its birth, cracks began to form at *Slash* for different motives. A first important change was when Steve Samiof and Melanie Nissen broke up. "She stopped taking photos for the magazine," recalls Philly. Samiof, for his part, was disillusioned with punk music: "with all due respect, I didn't like any of those groups that came out of the suburbs and outskirts. They didn't have anything to do with the punks from the beginning, with Hollywood, that had a great artistic sensibility," he says, referring to the second way of Los Angeles punk, that came out of the outlying neighborhoods of LA with violent and fast bands (like Black Flag, Circle Jerks…). However, this wasn't the primary reason for his discontent.

Little by little, Bob Biggs, the friend through whom Claude and Samiof became friends, had taken a leading role at the magazine. This designer, who had been in the orbit of *Slash* from the beginning, knew the spirit of the magazine intimately. "Biggs, like Claude, had an outsider's perspective of what was going on in culture. And both also happened to have a sense of humor that hid something deeper," recalls Susan Martin, Bob's ex-partner and friend of our protagonists. She recalls: Bob and Claude were both fucking fun." The feelings of affinity were reciprocal. "Claude was an authentic rebel; he was against the whole establishment," says Biggs about our protagonist.

At first, Biggs only assumed the role of *Slash's* sponsor when they needed capital. "I had money, so I loaned them a thousand dollars," he says. The money was to finance Germs' second single, which was going to come out on Slash Records, a new record label tied to the magazine. Samiof retells how the idea of making records had a lot to do with the Germs, most of all, with their vocalist: "I knew Darby Crash since he was in high school. I had a flower shop that he would tend to pass by, and when he already had the group, Darby came in one day and told us: "we want to make a record with Slash," he recalls.

They also wanted to, so they put their hands to work: "Melanie carried in our car the boys from Germs to the studio to record," recounts Samiof. *Lexicon Devil* (1978), the cornerstone of American punk and the record label's first pressing, came out of that session. But what could have been the start of an

alliance ended up becoming the *casus belli* between Samiof and Biggs. It is already known: where there's money, disagreements are bound to come up.

Darby Crash on the cover of number 9 of *Slash,* April 1978)

On this page and the next: photographs from The Decline of Western Civilization (Penelope Spheeris, 1981)

"Bob Biggs wanted to get involved, but money wasn't his only motivation. He saw the potential to make money with *Slash*," remembers Samiof. Biggs for his part has never denied this suggestion: "I wasn't too interested in meeting these people [the punks] […]. My implication in the punk scene was always fundamentally economic," he explains.

Samiof—without Melanie, moving on from punk music and uncomfortable with Biggs' presence in the picture—jumped ship. He concentrated on a new project: *Stuff*, a magazine dedicated to graphic design, and Biggs took the helm. "I bought *Slash. Claude wrote almost all the articles; he was an iconoclast, a rebel,"* he recounts.

The new director introduced new forms of working: "Bob wanted Claude to dedicate all his time to *Slash.* And for that work, he paid him 100 dollars each month. It was very little," Philly remembers. Claude left his job at Al's Kitchen, and so the responsibility to make ends meet fell on her now that her boyfriend had to work more hours with less income. Her days lasted forever, and when the time would come to rest, Philly would normally come home to discover that Claude had staged some sort of party: "Sometimes I would shut myself in the bathroom to get some rest when there were people in our house. I would only sleep four or five hours each day. I was always very tired," she tells me.

Ut (Photograph: Philomena Winstanley)

But *Slash's* wheels kept on turning. Biggs was a businessman and was certain that LA punk could be economically viable. "If I were a fan consumed by the music, I would be incapable of making determined decisions in the music industry, by overvaluing its worth. My job is to find—or to create—a market for a record and that sometimes forced me to be inflexible," he says.

And that was just what he did. As the head of Slash Records, he published the first albums for Germs and X, for which he counted on well-known producers (the rocker Joan Jett for the first and Ray Manzarek, from The Doors, for the second one) and invested $6,000 and $10,000 to record them, respectively, laughable sums of money for a big record, but astronomical in the punk world.

BPeople, one of the first postpunk bands from Los Angeles. Their singer and guitarist, Alex Gibson (wearing a Residents shirt), was during those years Penelope Houston's boyfriend. Houston was the singer of The Avengers and one of the most prominent figures of the first wave of San Francisco punk (Photograph: Philomena Winstanley).

The play went well: both records got good press, they sold tens of thousands of copies (most of all, "Los Angeles" by X) and would become classics in the world of independent American rock. But most important is what put them on the industry's map. Little by little they created a niche in the music industry, and during the 80s and 90s, Slash Records became one of the major independent American rock labels. Under this brand they grew to know enormous bands with international clout, like Faith No

More, Violent Femmes or L7. The logo, painted by Samiof in a few seconds, appears on the records of bands that have generated hundreds of thousands of dollars.

“Some people think that the way Slash evolved was politically incorrect, but I don’t feel any obligation to lock myself into one musical style until the end of days,” Biggs would say years later, when he already found himself on the top of the music business.

Philly settled the score decades later: “Bob asked us: ‘but how much do you need?’ and after that, we didn’t go back to ask him for anything else,” Philly concludes.

She kept getting more tired of punk music, quite the opposite of Claude, who every day immersed himself even more in the music. He made the jump from the page to the stage, forming a group with friends from different underground bands (The Bags, The Zeros…). They baptized themselves as Catholic Discipline. “I saw it painted in red on a wall, while I was cleaning The Masque one morning,” he would recall later about the origin of the name.

He sang, quite well, considering that he had never done it before. With his French accent and his hoarse stylings, he found his own unique style. “Sitting in a room, surrounded by bottles; my friends have all left, and my head is on fire,” he exclaims on “Underground Babylon,” a key theme of Catholic Discipline, a reflection about when the party has ended but the mind keeps going one hundred miles an hour.

A state of mind that Claude knew well, and that Philly grew tired of.

Philly and Claude watching a movie (Archive, Philomena Winstanley)

CHAPTER 9

CLAUDE'S SHOW

I was so wasted

I was a hippie

I was a burnout

I was a dropout

I was out of my head

"Wasted," Black Flag

Steve Jones, from Sex Pistols, in swim trunks and flexing for Philly. Photos from the interview with the guitarist in *Slash* (Volume 2, number 2, November 1978)

Although Catholic Discipline didn't record a single record, the band left a small footnote in the history of rock because they appear in *The Decline of Western Civilization*, a cult film about the punk scene in Los Angeles (it debuted in 1981). The director, Penelope Spheeris, was Bob Biggs' girlfriend. Before, she had been a script writer for *Saturday Night Live*, the mythical TV program. She also directed music videos (Fleetwood Mac, The Doobie Brothers…). It was her first movie.

In *The Decline of Western Civilization*, bands appear grouped up together when in reality they had very little to do with each other: the ultra-aggressive punk of Circle Jerks and the more bohemian X had very different followers, for example. The result is more for effect than to create a true depiction –contextualized and with stories—of a music scene (seeing Darby Crash making himself a big breakfast is shocking but doesn't reflect the intelligence those who knew him spoke of).

Claude interviewed in *The Decline of Western Civilization* (Penelope Spheeris, 1981)

Alice Bag, who shows up performing in the movie, reflects: "I saw it in the movie theater when it came out. I didn't like it because I got sad seeing how it had documented a time I remembered another way. You see the change of waves from punk to another, and those of us from the city's first punk groups seem strange," she explains. Filmed during the 80s, it captures an era of transition: punk's expansion from Hollywood to the peripheral neighborhoods of LA, the feeling of moment from being something underground, to turn into a movement followed by thousands of teens, who felt more attracted to the anti-authoritarian aggressiveness of Black Flag than to X, for example.

Spheeris's closeness to *Slash* remains clear in the film. There's a 15 minute section in the editorial office of the magazine, in which Biggs calls the shots and tells *Slash's* story from their point of view: "It started with a 1000 copy run, on very fine paper, and now we distribute 20,000. It's a miracle that this survives," he explains. At his side, Claude and Philly appear. The director says that they receive letters from readers around the world, from "places like Tokyo or Madrid," and Kickboy reads some.

In the same way, this link had to do with Catholic Discipline's inclusion in the movie, without a record published and barely a dozen concerts under their belts (hobnobbing with filmed bands like Fear, Germs or Black Flag). Over images of a live show of Catholic Discipline, fragments of an interview with Kickboy appear, boasting his punk genius: "There is no such thing as new wave. It does not exist. It's a

figment of a lame cunt's imagination. There was never any such thing as new wave. It was the polite thing to say when you were trying to explain you were not into the boring old rock 'n' roll, but you didn't dare to say punk because you were afraid to get kicked out of the fucking party and they wouldn't give you coke anymore," he makes the kind of gesture an ornery kid would make, while making what would end up being his most celebrated declaration. And when they ask him about his motivation for writing, he explains that "it's for poking the noses of comfy people who don't realize anything."

Slash was changing, as was Philly and Claude's relationship. All the parties were wearing them down. Behind closed doors, and after a few drinks, Claude was a lot less fun than how he seemed in public. "When Claude was drunk, he could be very disagreeable with me, and that's something nobody likes," Philly recounts. She adds: I had to play mom. I carried him home when he was super-drunk, and he said: 'stay away,' so he stayed there sleeping in the car."

Kickboy Face started eclipsing Calm Claude. "With punk music he turned into something else. That whole persona was very exaggerated. It was about always partying with the Claude who wasn't my Claude," she details. "A lot of people would ask me how I could put up with a guy who would never stop talking, so I would explain that they were just seeing the face he puts on for the outside world. At home, he's calm. The best friends knew the more paused side, but a lot of people didn't," she adds.

Tired of Kickboy Face, *Slash*, the interminable workdays, the parties… and, in general, tired of a lifestyle that no longer excited her and left her feeling drained, Philly made a difficult decision. "One day I told Claude: 'this is too much for me. I need to put my feet on the ground. I want to die.' And I explained to him: 'if you want to come with me, come along then; but if you don't, then don't.' It wasn't a bluff. I thought: if he wants to come, okay; but in case he doesn't, then that's okay too," she says. She packed her bags and returned to London: "I left with as little as possible. I told Claude: 'if you want to come, sell my car."

And so it goes that Philomena returned from what she had thought would only be a short vacation to the city she had abandoned seven years ago.

Basement 5 (Photograph: Philomena Winstanley)

The Gears was a punk rock band of the classic cut that barely played outside of Los Angeles. Despite having good songs and a forceful sound, they always stayed in the background; possible because they emerged later than the first wave of punk groups (X, The Weirdos…) –at the end of 1978—and their sound wasn't as aggressive to fit in with the second-wave hardcore bands like Black Flag or the Circle Jerks). Their more emblematic song is "Don't be Afraid to Pogo." (Photograph: Philomena Winstanley)

CHAPTER 10

POSTPUNK, THATCHERY… A HOUSE WITH A SHARED GARDEN

I question your love

May I make an observation

Your bite is worse than my aggression

I should have known better

"I Should Have Known Better," Wire

The London that Philly returned to was very different from the one she had left behind seven years ago. "It had become very expensive to live there, even more so than Los Angeles." They were privatizing everything and had closed high schools, asylums, hospitals… People were obsessed with money," she explains. Thatcherism had taken root in Great Britain, and as a result, its capitol became full of yuppies. Despite the rampant materialism, she was happy with the change: "The city is culturally much richer than Los Angeles. There are more expositions, galleries… It has always had all kinds of things to do like that." And not just that: she could finally sleep for eight hours at a time.

She settled down temporarily at her brother Paul's house, the same brother who took care of her when she left her parents. Finding work wasn't hard: her experience in Hollywood served as a calling card with film producers and publishers. She quickly made connections in the British Capitol.

Claude stayed in Los Angeles, though not for long. He lived out the last dying breaths of *Slash* there, while punk music scattered through different neighborhoods on the outskirts of LA. New micro-scenes emerged, each with their own bands, fanzines and spokespeople. The magazine no longer had the role it had before, and on top of that, his job became monotonous and too loosely defined: "It got to a point where it was going so fast that he was writing reviews of singles while listening to them for the first time. As soon as he would finish a record he would have already finished the writeup. It was ridiculous," he would recount later. But most importantly, he didn't have Philly by his side anymore, and she was the key to the whole operation at the magazine. Without her it just wasn't possible to keep *Slash* going.

The last edition of *Slash* was published in the summer of 1980, a few weeks after our protagonist left LA. It wasn't the only symbol of a bygone era: a few months later, on December 7th, 1980, Darby Crash would commit suicide. The Germs' leader made a pact with a friend to take their lives together with an overdose of heroin. Nothing turned out how they had expected. She survived, and he didn't make it to the pantheon of early-deceased rockers like he may have fantasized: the next day, John Lennon was shot to death. Darby's death was totally eclipsed by that of Lennon's.

While the punks were saying their goodbyes to Darby, Claude hopped on a plane to fly to England to get back together with his girlfriend after three months of separation. As often happens, things between them became more clear with distance. "In London I realized that I missed him. I would call him to see how he was, and he would call me too. We realized that while we were far from each other, it was the first time that we had been apart in seven years," Philly explains. It helped a lot to stay

in contact that Claude found a phonecard on the street: “He would call me every day. I just hope nobody ever had to pay for those calls,” she jokes.

Back together again, the couple moved to Ladbroke Grove, close to Notting Hill, on the west side of London, in “a very agreeable home, with a small, shared garden,” as she remembers. No longer did they have a beach out front, but the neighborhood, with its bookstores and small businesses, was very pleasant, and it had a surging bohemian aura (little to do with its current refinement).

Claude had pulled some strings to get a job at Rough Trade, a small record store that, with the explosion of punk in London, had transformed itself into a big record label and independent distributor. “It was something serious, with a salary and everything,” Philly remarks about her boyfriend’s new position. “He got there like most of us that worked there: attracted to the postpunk movement in London, that Rough Trade had a key role in,” recalls Pete Donne, Claude’s friend who worked—and continues working—at Rough Trade.

At the beginning of the 80s, London was the main showcase for the most avant-garde of rock. Rough Trade was the primary catalyst for what was brewing in the underground: postpunk, the offshoot of punk with more intellectual and artistic pretensions. The punk motto of “do it yourself” transformed into “make something your own.” It was a fertile and competitive environment. “The groups took themselves more seriously than in Los Angeles. Everything was more professional,” Philly recalls.

Rough Trade wasn’t your typical company: it was impregnated by the socialist and anti-capitalist spirit (for example, all employees were paid the same, “even management,” Philly points out). In barely three years, it had turned into a large and complex framework that needed to professionalize itself; though their bosses always kept themselves at arms’ length of the music industry, their archenemy.

Claude was hired to the press department. His job was to promote the bands that worked under Rough Trade’s umbrella, scheduling interviews with journalists, writing promotional pages … “I remember he was always excited and enthusiastic, with a cigarette in his hand,” says Donne.

Richard Thomas, another friend from this era who moved in the same circles as Philly and Claude, also remembers when he showed up: “He was received affectionately, and the bands were lucky to have him by their side. Although, it’s also true that if he didn’t like your music, he would make sure you knew immediately.”

The Ladbroke Grove metro station at the beginning of the 80s. Below, Rough Trade at the end of the seventies, on Kensington Park Road

Extraverted and sociable, it was easy for Claude to make new friends. Even with people he didn’t start off with on the right foot. Graham Lewis, the bassist for Wire, pioneer postpunk band (cited as a key influence for groups as diverse as R.E.M., Blue, and even The Cure) remembers him: “One day in 1980 I heard my telephone ring, and it was Claude. At first, honestly, I felt lazy and thought: ‘what does this guy want?’' he recalls. He still remembered Claude upset at having to defend the axioms of punk at that boring party in Los Angeles a few years ago. Despite everything, they made plans to have a beer together.

“We met in a pub called Blenheim Arms. It was close to Rough Trade’s offices. After just a couple of pints, he opened up” ‘I have to beg your forgiveness.’ I felt caught, because I didn’t know what he was talking about, so then, he said: ‘You were right: punk is dead. The Clash’s fucking security guards kicked

me off-stage at a concert and hit me, and the group kept playing like nothing had happened,'" Graham Lewis recounts. "He was hurting and asked me: 'Can we forget about it?' Of course, we buried the hatchet and became good friends," he recalls. During those years, they were inseparable.

Claude, on top of being fun and charismatic, had street-cred. "When he arrived in London he already had status: he was a guy who knew, for example, Mark E. Smith, from The Fall, and who was friends with Genesis P-Orridge," recalls Lewis. Thanks to *Slash*, Kickboy had interviewed and made friends with various relevant postpunk figures. Although in the case of P. Orridge, the link was outside of the fanzine. "I've known him since we were kids," Philly recounts about this very influential figure on the British music scene of that time. "Philomena was the sister of one of my best friends from high school, Peter 'Pinglewad' Winstanley," Genesis explains.

At that time, Genesis was known for leading Throbbing Gristle, one of the pioneer bands and foundations of industrial music. Full of North England factories, these surroundings are where the group grew up and were fundamental in shaping their sound. "It might sound cliché, but we just wanted to recreate the noise around us," Chris Carter, a member of the band who played synthesizers made from scrap metal, recalls. "What sense does it make doing something that has already been done for decades? There will always be someone better than you at doing it. Why not try something that nobody else has done yet?," proclaims Genesis, reflecting on the motivations behind Throbbing Gristle.

Throbbing Gristle (Photograph: Philomena Winstanley)

On this page and the following: Throbbing Gristle: Genesis P-Orridge and Cosey Fanni Tutti (Photographs: Philomena Winstanley)

As became clear in an extensive interview published in *Slash*, Claude felt a strong harmony with Throbbing Gristle ("You can't want to be a nuisance only because of your repressed past, can you?" he asked Genesis). The respect was mutual: "Claude was a beatnik in essence when these people had turned into sorority sisters. It was all a compliment that he would write the forward for our album *Greatest Hits*," Genesis explains and recalls: "We loved Claude."

Greatest Hits. Entertainment Through Pain (1980), by Throbbing Gristle, includes a more serious passage written by Claude, without a trace of his habitual irony: "It had become my responsibility to put these lines together for the coronation for this glory… A work that reunites a few unforgettable and unrepeatable years of daring and obsequious art," he wrote.

He wrote some introductions for other bands' records, but with time it would become the source of a special pride. "People knew his past, and he liked to impress with his texts for Throbbing Gristle. A lot of people flipped out," his friend Mark Cunningham, pioneer musician of the prestigious no-wave movement from New York, who coincided with Claude in Barcelona years later.

At the same time that Claude opened up in the London music scene, Philly did the same in the AV world. "I worked first and foremost in publicity, but in that era, I was also on the drawing team that made *The Snowman*. It was very beautiful," she says about this animated Christmas film that premiered in 1982, for which David Bowie lent his voice to the protagonist.

She was becoming more untethered every day from the music world. "In London it was more about going to galleries than to concerts," she says. And at the few concerts she attended, she hardly

ever took her camera to take pictures. “Claude scolded me. He told me ‘you have to bring it,’ but I felt lazy,” she confesses.

In this new stage, they each found their own way. At the middle of the day, they usually would meet close to Rough Trade to eat lunch and catch up with each other.

Stiff Little Fingers interviewed in *Slash* (volume 2, number 4, March 1979) and photographed by Philomena Winstanley

CHAPTER 11

AT A PICNIC WITH NICK CAVE

I have a friend in you, oh Mr. Clarinet

You make me laugh, and then cry like the song of the clarinet.

Marry me, marry me alive

"Mr. Clarinet," The Birthday Party

The year they landed in London, Philly and Claude's landlord brought them bad news: He was going to have a baby and needed to move into the house that he was renting to them in Ladbroke Grove. This time they weren't so lucky as they had been before when the time came to find a new home: the city was becoming more expensive every day, and rentals in the more central neighborhoods were becoming unaffordable. After looking at a thousand options, they settled down into Elephant and Castle, a humble zone in the south of London that, in Philomena's words, "was dirty and nothing pretty."

The apartment that they found wasn't what you would call luxurious: "We didn't have our own bathroom, and you had to use a communal one that was coin operated," Philly recalls. Though, worse than that were the hamburger wrappers that were always sitting on the floor around the entryway, the fault of the McDonald's next to it. Despite being in a remote neighborhood, the house turned into the regular hangout for their new group of friends. There were no more parties like the ones in LA, just more relaxed meetups: "It was more about eating together, with a fine wine," explained Philly.

Claude liked to introduce people who didn't know each other, but who had similar hang-ups; like he was conducting a social experiment. His friend Graham Lewis, a regular at the couple's flat, recalls one such time: "He did it because he wanted to see what would happen." He remembers one of those moments in particular: "One time he took Howard Devoto and me to his house. We both knew who the other was, but we had never met," he remembers.

It made sense to put them together: Lewis and Devoto were both pioneers of the British postpunk scene, both successful with their respective bands—Lewis with Wire, and Devoto with Buzzcocks and Magazine—but they came from two different worlds: Lewis had grown up in the London underground, while Howard grew up in Manchester, two musical worlds that at that time worked in parallel, but without much overlap.

Claude didn't just introduce them. He also tried to get a reaction out of each of them: "He gave us the lyrics to Trout Mask Replica, by Captain Beefheart (1969). We had never read it because they didn't come with the English edition of the record, but he had an American copy that did have them," Lewis Explains. "Reading is very different from just listening," he points out. Considering how influential the record was on the first English punks, it could be interesting to see their reactions upon reading the lyrics for the first time.

Among friends, it became tradition to celebrate Claude's birthday in Hyde Park, with a picnic organized by the couple. Musicians and artists of all kinds would show up there, between those who were there, some would eventually get very famous, like a wiry Australian with dark hair who knew Claude when he took his first steps in London.

“Nick Cave was a good friend of Claude’s,” Philly states as she explains how the friendship emerged: “They met at Dingwalls [a concert-hall in Camden, the rocker neighborhood of London] before Nick got popular, though he got popular very fast. He lived in a boat on the Thames, and we would usually go to his parties there,” she says. “Nick Cave was always grateful to Claude because he introduced him to important people in the music industry when he still wasn’t well-known. He told Daniel Miller, from Mute Records, to go listen to him at Dingwalls, where he ended up signing him,” she adds.

Claude chatting with Nick Cave (Photograph: Philomena Winstanley)

“Her boyfriend popularized “Claude’s show” in London with his excesses and happenings. “He was the hedonist par excellence,” Donne, of Rough Trade, remembers. “He ended up being provocative, even for punks,” Lewis recalls. He explains why: “He wasn’t afraid to argue and was free of prejudices. He wasn’t politically correct at all. He would say he loved Dolly Parton or that he had written an essay on Kung Fu. He wouldn’t distinguish between high and low culture.” In an environment like that of postpunk, impregnated by references and intellectual pretensions (artistic vanguards, situationism…), even that could end up being incorrect or offensive.

After a few pints, Claude was able to disturb even the most extreme personalities. “I remember a night when after drinking around there, Shane MacGowan of The Pogues told me about Claude: “I’m never drinking with this lunatic again,” his friend Richard Thomas says. That isn’t something to scoff at, coming from a musician like MacGowan, known –among many excesses—for receiving journalists with a gin and tonic in his hand at nine in the morning.

But at his job, Claude took things seriously. He carried out his work at Rough Trade, basing himself on his experience with *Slash*: he knew how to sell a group, he had that sixth sense about what people liked… This was especially valuable in London, where—differently from Los Angeles—the music press actually was influential and needed to discover new talents to support the industry. “There were three weekly music magazines, and his presence and support determined the future for the bands,” Thomas emphasizes.

Claude Celebrating his birthday in Hyde Park; behind and to the left, sits Nick Cave (Photograph: Philomena Winstanley)

At Rough Trade, Claude worked hand in hand with Scott Piering, an American and seasoned veteran from the big record labels in the United States. They made a good team: Claude had the European, intellectual vision, and the other, was more pragmatic and American. “Scott was another type of extraordinaire. His role in the success of The Smiths was key,” recalls Lewis.

Wire’s bassist gives a perspective from the group that worked hand in hand with Claude: “It was our press representative because Rough Trade distributed Dom’s (a group that existed as a footnote in Wire’s career) records. Claude differentiated himself from most because he put himself on the group’s side, in front of the label’s interests. He would tell us ‘why the hell would you send the record to these ninety European Journalists? Give them to these forty that truly know.’ His vision wasn’t the most orthodox,” Lewis recalls. “There was no other place with as many music journalists as Great Britain. But while there might be four weekly magazines, Claude was very skeptical about their quality. He thought

that it might be better to send our albums to Japan, where there was an audience that was more interested in us and groups influenced by what we were doing," he clarifies.

However, the bosses at Rough Trade didn't agree, and when times got tough, they fired Claude, a little more than a year after he started working for them. "They fired him because Claude refused to promote The Raincoats because he didn't like them. His boss told him 'you either do your job, or you won't have one,' so finally they got rid of him," Philly recounts.

His trouble with The Raincoats, a playful and melodic postpunk group, was maybe only the tip of the iceberg: as Rough Trade grew, his bosses tried to adapt to the top level of the music industry. While at first, they had signed contracts with bands on napkins, they quickly moved on to investing tens of thousands of pounds on producing successful singles. This brought with it various difficulties.

Tensions mounted, and interests crossed. Everyone couldn't get on the same page concerning how to direct the machinery. "We were young and had a lot to learn about the workings of the industry, making contracts…" Geoff Travis, the label's founder explains. Lawyers, auditors and other characters barely familiar with the underground got into the game.

"Quickly, they would talk to you about how they had to sell units. Units! Until then we had always talked about music," recalls Austin Palmer, an old worker in the Rough Trade storefront. Many like Claude had come seduced by the creativity and liberty offered by Rough Trade and ended up feeling dislocated. "The changes that they made created a whole new organization, and Claude probably felt that he was no longer up to snuff in this regime," Donne explains. Graham Lewis is more explicit: "I think Claude left getting more and more frustrated with Geoff Travis."

The firing left a bitter taste in Claude's mouth and left the couple stranded in one of the most expensive cities with only Philly's salary.

CHAPTER 12

EXILE IN THE HACIENDA

How does it feel

To treat me like you do?

When you've laid your hands upon me

And told me who you are?

Thought I was mistaken

I thought I heard your words

Tell me, how do I feel?

“Blue Monday,” New Order

With Claude’s firing, the financial pressure, once again, fell back on Philly. They had to tighten their belts. “I bought a bicycle to save money on London’s public transport,” she recounts. After his jaunt through Rough Trade, there were some challenging months until Claude found another job, newly in an emblematic and influential site for music. This wasn’t a coincidence: He was well liked, had good contacts and knew how the underground worked. “He was very good at his job, at knowing where things were going, where to go and get involved, '' journalist Jon Savage emphasizes. At that moment, a lot was boiling 300 kilometers north of London, in Manchester. From the particulars of punk, a new musical movement had grown in this industrial city, functioning in parallel to the London music scene. It had its own bands, record labels and audience. “In Manchester, important things were happening, but a lot of people in London weren’t aware of it or just didn’t bother to learn about it,” explains Savage.

In the spring of 1982, Claude started working at The Hacienda, in Manchester: The club where Acid House was born, taking ecstasy became popular, and most importantly, where dance culture emerged as we know it today. “Tony Wilson called Claude and asked him if he wanted to work with him in Manchester on the weekends,” Philly recalls.

Tony Wilson (deceased in 2007, at 57 years of age) was the manager of The Hacienda. He was a singular person in the music industry. A kind and wise person, he had a lot to do with what Manchester would grow into musically at the end of the seventies and for much of the eighties. Together with a couple of friends, he founded Factory Records, which published records from bands that would define the city’s sound (Joy Division, New Order, Happy Mondays…). Art always came first in front of profit in his decisions, no matter how reckless or unprofitable they were. “Some people make money, others make history,” he would often say.

In Fact 125, *Bessy Talks* Turkey, a promotional video aired for Factory Records during Christmas of 1984

Promotional cassette copy of a recording from Birthday Party from Factory Records. This cassette and others were in the box that got into the hands of the author and the editors of this book together with Philly’s photographs

Cover of *Slash* (volume 2, number 11, December of 1979)

"Of all the punk movement, the singer of Dead Kennedys was, together with Darby Crash [of Germs], the smartest," Philly says. Here she captured the band from San Francisco in their very first days. Jello Biafra, the vocalist of the group, is the second to the left.

Claude fit right into this approach. What he offered Wilson was enticing: to be the video jockey for The Hacienda, an immense club that ended up opening with the money that New Order's success brought to Factory Records. Peter Hook, the bassist of this well-known band, who also directed this space recalls: "We hired Claude Bessy to take charge of the video projections, which were very important to set the tone of the space. The first thing that people noticed were his films, which were like collages that were projected onto screens." The idea came from popular discos in Manhattan that New Order and Wilson had known of on the other side of the pond.

The most iconic image of The Hacienda is the one that appears in the popular movie *24 Hour Party People* (2002), about Tony Wilson's life, directed by Michael Winterbottom: hundreds of adolescents packed together on drugs, dancing to house music and wearing the *smiley* logo. In their first days, instead, the club had a fairly dreary atmosphere and was mostly populated by its own staff: a score of young idealists and hedonists, who worked for next-to-nothing under Wilson's refuge.

Tim Chambers, who back then was in charge of public relations for the club remembers those times fondly: "It was a scene with an open mind where getting involved was almost an obligation. If you didn't do it, where would you find people who liked the same groups as you? Nobody was professional, so everyone was there to learn. That made us join us all at the hip. We were like a family," he explains. Soon after, he became good friends with Claude. "it was someone who had lived, read, travelled, and consumed. He made the strongest coffee I had ever drank and had that French accent that made him almost seem like a character out of the funny pages," he recounts.

Although Claude had never worked as a VJ, he picked up his new position quickly. He hooked up a couple of VHS players to some projectors to play videos on enormous screens that were on each side of the club's stage. "He made the mix of images live, changing the tape ribbons on the fly," Chambers recounts.

His intentions—of course—were to be provocative and not leave anybody unphased. He fit practically everything into his videos. "It was apparent that Claude managed all sorts of referents: Burroughs, situationism, dadaism…" Chambers recalls. To stock up on images, he used the same method as thousands of teens in the 80s: copying movies that he rented from the video store. "He made collections of cartoons, antidrug campaigns, sex-ed videos and nuclear catastrophes.

Chronicle of one of John Cale's concerts, photographed by Philly (*Slash*, volume 2, number 10, November 1979)

Alex Gibson from Bpeople (Photograph: Philomena Winstanley)

Phranc, photographed by Philly, at a concert with Nervous Gender at Club 88 in Los Angeles (regular stage for punk groups). Philly remembers this unique character from the early days of Angeleno punk: "She was a lesbian who always wanted to be a boy. She was adopted by a Jewish family, but she

searched for her mom and pop, which made her into some sort of Al Capone figure. She was a good surfer; she was always hanging out with the boys"

Claude found himself here again with an old colleague, someone he used to go to punk concerts in LA with: Jon Savage. The journalist, who at that time worked as a DJ in the legendary club, also remembers Claude's work as a video jockey: "He would put things up that bothered a lot of people: porn, gore and many other horrendous images. The porn generated various critiques from feminists," he remembers.

Provoking the staff, on top of having an artistic direction, was a good antidote for his boredom. Savage explains why: "the conventional wisdom was that there weren't a lot of people, and that burnt us. It wasn't just that. Dumb youngsters would come up to us asking us to put on Culture Club, Killing Joke and other groups that we hated. One night, we got tired of it, so I put on "I'm sick of you," by The Stooges, six times in a row. It was crazy, because on another channel William Burroughs was reciting poetry. The matter was ending, and we could hear their groans, until we put it on again," he retells about this uncomfortable troublemaking (keeping in mind that the song was 7 minutes long) that lasted a whole hour.

And as things go when you work at night, the dead hours gave room for chemical excesses. "In Manchester there was a ton of hash, and I smoked a lot of joints, but I suspect that Claude and I didn't take the same kinds of drugs," Savage speculates.

So it was. Claude put himself back together here with some of his old, less-healthy habits, as his friend Chambers makes out: "Claude quickly discovered the intensity that his job required during so many hours, and that could require something to help you stay on your feet. Keeping in mind his excessive character, this didn't stay at a minimum, instead each time it got to be more and more. There came a point where it was two in the morning, and he was like new. You would tell him 'Claude, you've been putting on videos for five hours,' and he would respond 'What's next?'"

Drugs weren't only for enduring or stretching out the night. They were also good for more practical reasons, his friend explains. "Claude often wouldn't go to bed once for an entire weekend at a time. In this way, staying awake from Friday through Sunday, he wouldn't have to pay for lodging. And Claude couldn't have been charging well for the work he did," Chambers reveals. Philly, for her part points out: "Sometimes he would stay at Mark Smith's house or C.P. Lee's, a friend of a group called Alberto y Lost Trios Paranoias."

In London she didn't have many doubts about what her boyfriend was doing on the weekend. "I think he got back into a lot of amphetamines. On Mondays he would come home to London wiped out, not hungry, but happy and content to be home," she recalls. Although Claude, in general, preferred not to talk to her much about his drug consumption. "After the scare he had from an out of body experience, he stopped shooting up amphetamines, but I always had the feeling that if somebody would invite him, he would still do it. He never told me anything though. It was like he wanted to protect me from all that or something."

On Monday mornings, it would be time to come home to a calmer life in London, and as anyone who is well-acquainted with partying from Friday to Sunday can tell you, waking up the next morning is never exactly pleasant. Claude, on top of all that, had to wake up early to catch the return train. He invented a system to not stay asleep: He would tie an alarm clock to his head, with a piece of tape to make sure that he would definitely hear it," Philly recounts. A strange system that gave cause for strange

situations. “One time he forgot to take it off and got into a taxi. The taxi driver couldn’t stop looking at him, so Claude jeered at him: “Why the hell are you looking at me like that,” until he realized why… then he just said, “oh, right, the alarm clock.”

“This is Ted Milton, a good friend who was also a puppeteer, Philomena explains. This Brit also played saxophone for Blurt, a postpunk band that appeared in *Slash*, and in more recent years, has done expositions with installations in Paris, Brussels, and London (where he lives). Eric Clapton ran into him in the 60s, and in his biography remembers him as “an extraordinary man, a visionary.” Philly’s photo is taken in London, on a trip that she and Claude had when they still resided in Los Angeles

Chronicle of a concert in the UK, Subs and the pogo. Photograph by Philly (*Slash,* volume 2, number 4, March of 1979)

CHAPTER 13

HALLELUJAH! THE MADNESS IS SPREADING

Kill yr. idols, sonic death

It's the end of the world and confusion is sex

"Kill Yr Idols," Sonic Youth

At this point in time, Philly was pretty detached from music. "I went to very few shows, only those of groups that I liked a lot. My favorites were The Fall, Sonic Youth, Magazine, Virgin Prunes and New Order," she lists out.

About once each month, she would go with her boyfriend to Manchester, but usually she would stay at home alone in London. That way she could take a little break from Claude's intensity. "Whenever he would go to Manchester, I would feel more relaxed, doing my own things. This helped our relationship. For me it was like 'okay, a few days without Claude.' He always wanted to invite people over, and when he left, I could get away from people and not have to cook, as I wish to be sometimes. But he was a person who never liked to be alone. Not at all," she says.

In Manchester, Claude, on top of working as a video jockey at The Hacienda, Claude went on to form a part of Ikon, a branch of Factory Records in charge of making music videos for groups connected to Factory Records or to Manchester's music scene. It didn't have anything to do with the super productions that started coming out on the recently born MTV, instead it came about as a coincidence, without big money or pretensions and carried out with just a few colleagues.

Chambers was one of these and recounts how everything started: "Ikon was founded by Malcolm Whitehead, who worked at Manchester Airport as a baggage handler. There he borrowed, without asking anybody, a camera that they used to record pilot training. He started taking it at night to concerts and leaving it in its place the next morning so that nobody would notice," he explains, then points out that "that's how he started making videos for Manchester bands, like Joy Division." In fact, Whitehead is the author of the first recorded images of Ian Curtis' band. Little by little, Whitehead started pulling in friends to record, edit, or even just hold up props during recordings.

What began in a bedroom with the most basic technology, grew, and Ikon went on to occupy Rony Wilson's basement. Chambers, who was in charge of production work, remembers that place: "it was just a basic, rudimentary room, with a couple U-matic players, which was a format with giant tape reels," he explains.

There, they would go in the wee hours of the morning after closing The Hacienda. Between beers and chemical stimulants, they would sit down to edit mini-movies with whatever material Whitehead had shot from a recent concert. "We managed to not make too much noise because we were at Tony's house, but from time to time, we would go upstairs to grab a tea or some food from his kitchen," Chambers remembers.

Even though each person's responsibilities weren't clearly defined, when Claude joined the group, it was his turn to manage the scripts. "Everything turned out like 'we need a script,' and we would all sit down and write it there and then on paper, but Claude led the way," Chambers recalls. What they

ended up with wasn't exactly a classic narrative, but more so about telling a story, playing with contrasts and provocations, and brushing against the outlandish.

"Two years of punk in Los Angeles," (*Slash,* volume 2, number 7, August 1979)

Regarding the imagery, the lack of technical knowledge was noticeable: in their videos, the lighting shines through its absence, everything was crude… "we didn't have any idea. We were all learning as we went. And, to top it off, we normally had to do almost everything on the first take because the groups would get bored fast, or we simply didn't have permission to record wherever we were," Chambers remembers. In addition to concerts, the places to record could be at bars, the same street or a football stadium, the idea was to record wherever they could.

Their intentions were more aligned with video-art than with music-videos. They weren't understood by most. "Dynamic and powerful music goes with poorly edited images filmed on a shaky camera," NME magazine published. On another occasion, when they went to project videos of Joy Division at the Blackpool museum, the police came to disperse spectators congregating in the room of the showing. "There wasn't pornography or anything political. It was just a group of people watching footage of Joy Division live," Chambers points out.

"Ikon's videos, nevertheless, served to move bands from the underground, in a novel way: in a world without Youtube, being able to see live footage of smaller bands was something unusual, if not to say, an authentic luxury, and they didn't just make videos of musicians: one of their decisive moments was working with William S. Burroughs, the legendary writer who instigated the beat generation. Here's how Chambers recalls it: "we started working with Genesis P-Orridge, who had the rights to footage of William S. Burroughs, and we made a montage of his images and later filmed Burroughs himself at The Hacienda in what would become *The Final Academy Documents*."

They found a small niche of buyers. They themselves made the copies, with a couple VHS machines, of those videos they had recorded and edited (of The Fall, Virgin Prunes, New Order…), and then they would send them by mail. The economic benefits were conspicuous by their absence: "What was most important was to keep moving forward because there wasn't anybody else who was going to do it," Chambers recalls.

Claude even starred in a few videos. In these, samples of his two faces: on one side, the more paused and intellectual; and on the other, the excessive and provocative.

The Calm Claude starred in *Operating Instructions*; a piece included in a compilation of avant-garde videos (*TV Wipeout,* 1984). He appears alone, with sunglasses and a mask that covers his face, sitting in The Hacienda's basement. It is extravagant and intimate at the same time: while he passes sheets of paper with handwritten messages on them, he recites a poem.

Philomena on the film, directed by Whitehead: "The thing with the papers was from a Godard Movie; I don't remember if it was one with Jean-Paul Belmondo or Jean-Pierre Léaud. The poem is from a collection that Claude had written years before, that was titled *Hallelujah the Madness is Spreading,"* she recounts. "Don't bother me, life ain't no seminar," Claude says with a solemn tone at the end of this six minute-long short film, before taking off a mask and smiling to the camera, with a troublemaking and timid gesture. "Unfortunately, I do not have those poems. I lost them in Brazil a few years ago," Philly tells me.

“Life ain’t no seminar.” Claude in a film directed by Malcolm Whitehead in the basement of The Hacienda (1983)

He appears with much more excess in *Bessy Talks Turkey* (1984). “We wanted to do a Christmas special for Factory, and it seemed to us that the most logical way to do so would be as a video,” Chambers recalls. Claude shows up in this video with his feet on a disorganized table, while he rants and raves about Factory Records’ bands that he is apparently supposed to be promoting. For example, while talking about The Jazz Defektors, he doesn’t stop himself from saying “they are here because they put a lot of money into The Hacienda.” Finally, somebody’s hand out of shot of the camera hands him a wad of bills, which he grabs enthusiastically. It stands as a sort of ironic criticism about the dirty practices of the music industry.

At that point, in the middle of the 80s, the music industry in England had changed considerably. Various bands born in the underground had become enormous, and the independent labels were transforming into their own big industry. With the triumph of The Smiths, Rough Trade achieved what they had yearned for for so long: commercial success, without abandoning their indie-cred. In Factory’s environment, things stopped being so horizontal: “When New Order started making money, they hired film directors to make their videos. They turned into something else, and honestly, we felt a little left out,” Chambers says. “The scene grew rapidly and got to a point where there weren’t so many people who really wanted to change things left,” Graham resumes.

Claude’s sentiments weren’t very different. He made it clear at a Sonic Youth concert in London, where he made himself maestro of ceremonies. He made sure that it was his turn to introduce this dissonant rock band, so he could spew his bile towards the music industry, and especially, get the thorn out of his side that had been there for too long: his firing from Rough Trade. With a trembling and affected voice, he pronounced the following speech:

“Okay, I guess it’s time for me to say the whole ‘here with you tonight, all the way from the United States, Sonic Youth!,’ but the truth is that I’d like to take a couple of minutes of your attention. I have a short story to tell you… And two minutes isn’t much time, right? It’s a short but illuminating story. Sonic Youth is about to put out a record in this country, but their record label has decided to slam the breaks because the cover has offended some of the folks at Rough Trade. And I would like to say that it isn’t really that offensive. There’s a naked lady, a Puerto Rican lady, who isn’t doing anything strange. In these days of AIDS and hunger in Ethiopia, and all that, one thinks to themselves that record labels have more important things to do than to go about worrying about the shape of our bodies. That’s why I’ve thought that you might be interested, so the next time you buy a record, thinking that you’re very alternative and cool, now that everyone likes what they play on the alternative charts, remember that what’s there is exactly the same as what’s on the other side, just… a little stranger, maybe. Remember it: There isn’t a fucking bit of culture there. There is the same censorship of people our age, just like anywhere else.”

“Thanks for the introduction, Claude,” the band’s guitarist, Thurston Moore, lets out, just after the proclamation and before the band lets loose their wall of distortion and feedback. You can hear at the beginning of *Walls have Ears*, by Sonic Youth (1986), a much sought after bootleg record full of recordings from various concerts, that includes this speech by Claude. “Sonic Youth always had tremendous stories to tell about Claude,” recounts Mark Cunningham, a friend of Claude’s and of the

popular group from New York. It was the last stellar appearance of Claude in the music world. After that evening, Claude started distancing himself from the nightlife, from concerts, and “the Claude Show.”

Penetration, a band from the north of England, posing for Philly in some alleyway in London. Months later, *Slash’s* staff went to interview the group on their visit to Los Angeles, but the bad practices of their manager made them leave the hotel where they were scheduled, without conducting the interview.

“Music is my master.” Imagine in Volume 3, Number 5 of *Slash* (1980)

CHAPTER 14

IN THE BOHEMIAN, PRE-OLYMPIC BARCELONA

It's Sunday Afternoon

The sun isn't shining

The doors are closing

The illusion disappears

It is their love that is fleeing

Far away on the corridor

«Sangre y arena», Ultratruita

Claude left The Hacienda and set himself up full-time in London. Getting a new job turned into a matter of worry: "Claude only wanted to sleep, and I would tell him "you have to find a job." It was up to me to shake him out of bed in the morning," Philly tells me. After a time searching, he finally found a job at Forbidden Planet, a science fiction bookstore (it is now an international chain). For the first time in years, his job didn't have anything to do with music.

Just as the second half of the 80s began, Philly stayed immersed in the world of the 80s and AV, each time with bigger and bigger projects, such as *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1988), the famous film that mixes animation with live action. "It's the most boring job I've had. I would spend days tracing the star, Bob Hoskins." She got so tired that she left the project before it finished: "My boss told me: 'if you leave, you won't show up in the credits,' but I didn't care."

In London, the couple lived on a tight budget, especially Claude. "His friends called him *Buy me a pint Bessy.* I would give him enough money for his first pint, but then he would have to beg his friends," she recalls. When he wasn't in the science fiction store, he would spend the hours at the pub with his mates Graham Lewis and Richard Thomas, she recounts.

The city kept becoming less accessible and less stimulating musically. In addition, other inconveniences arose: Claude hated the English climate. As the years went by, it became difficult for him to handle rainy gray days. There came a point where he couldn't put up with it any longer: "One day he said" 'let's go somewhere sunny, please," Philly recounts. It was time for the couple to pack their bags once more.

They chose Barcelona to be their next change of scenery. The reasoning was because, according to an encouraging friend who lived in England, Philly got in contact with a producer in Barcelona who was putting together the production of an animated film: *despertaferro. El grito del fuego* [Awake Iron! The fire's cry] (1990). They were looking for someone with the right professional background.

She arrived in Barcelona three months before Claude, to find a home. After searching high and low, she finally found an apartment in the Maragall neighborhood that convinced her; simple, not too

big, with an accommodating terrace and enough space to fit their large collection of records and books. It would be their home for the next 15 years. Weeks later, Claude landed in the pre-Olympic Barcelona of 1987. “We’ll be here until the Sagrada Familia is finished,” he told the customs agent.

Barcelona fit with their life goals: it wasn’t expensive, they got to have the ocean close again (something that Philly longed for from their period in Los Angeles) and, most importantly, it was sunny almost every day of the year. It was ideal for starting a new stage of life. At this point, she didn’t just want a calmer life, Claude also wanted a fresh start.

But leaving their past behind wasn’t so easy: “The first day we went out to see our new neighborhood, a punk stopped Claude and asked him if he was Kickboy Face,” Philly recalls. Neither of them took a leading role in any music scene, though it didn’t take long for them to make friends with musicians and artists in the Barcelonan underground movement of the time.

Posters, collages and figures made by Claude and preserved by his friend, the artist and musician Mark Cunningham and Marc Taeger

One of his first friends in the city was Mark Cunningham, the American trumpet player best known for having played in Mars, the pioneer no-wave band, part of the prestigious movement from New York that fused art and punk at the end of the 70s. Cunningham, same as Philly and Claude, landed in Barcelona at the end of the 80s, seduced by the bohemian and affordable environment that at the time had little to do with the current Barcelona, overwhelmed with tourists and giant festivals known throughout the world. “It was a cheap and interesting city, eccentric and very local. It reminded me of New York in the 70s,” Cunningham recalls.

As often happens when one is new in town, the beginning was rough. Philly’s bosses for *Despertaferro* ended up breaking the law and skipping-out on paying Philly multiple times. “People would stay to sleep in front of the producer to protest,” she remembers. She was in a couple other productions in Barcelona, but there was little work in the field of animation, and it wasn’t very well paid. She had to reinvent herself.

As is the case with many English-speakers in our country, she and Claude ended up teaching English classes, first at an academy in the Grácia neighborhood, and later, teaching individuals. “Claude was a very good teacher. He had loyal students that he would manage for years,” Cunningham recounts, who, similar to them, alongside his music career, has worked in the field of English instruction.

The couple learned Spanish. Claude found the best teachers in what would quickly become his second home: the old-man bars in Maragall. He spent the hours with the local wildlife. “When I met Claude, it was in a moment where he had separated himself quite a bit from music. He was content with going to his neighborhood’s bars, drinking cognac and chatting with the strange old folks. He would tell his friends many of his stories,” Cunningham recalls.

He picked up Cervantes’ language quickly. “He was good at languages, but speaking Spanish, he would translate from English, instead of doing it from French, which would have been more logical because they’re more similar. One day he got to the bar that was below their house and started addressing the wait-staff, saying the whole time ‘hubiera’ [would have] or ‘hubiese’ [might have], trying to be funny: ‘If I had known, I would not have come.’ They told him: ‘What’s the matter, Claude? Are you

Don Quixote?' And he would respond, in jest, that it was because he had just learned the subjunctive," Philly recounts.

Their place became a frequent hangout for the new friends they were making, the same as in Los Angeles and London. "Normally, they would have dinner with seven or eight friends, more than would fit around the table. In the summer, we would get together on their terrace, and the rest of the year, inside. Claude loved to be the DJ and center of attention," Cunningham details. "People knew who he was and knew his history. With an audience, he felt at home," he adds. "The Claude Show" returned, now, before a more put together and grown-up audience.

Gat (José Castaño), a veteran of the experimental music scene of Barcelona (a member of Basura, Ultratruita and Pascal Comelade et son Nouvel Orchestre, among various other groups that stood out in the city's underground), also remembers: "Claude was an extreme figure, who evolved from morning to evening. His awakenings were evidently sober, and his evenings were delirious. At a party in their home, in which we were celebrating San Juan, he started throwing darts and ended up breaking a finger, for example."

The couple's life was more relaxed, but so many years of partying were taking an enormous toll on Claude, who was showing more symptoms of having a serious problem with alcohol all the time. "When he would go shopping, he would stop at the bars on the way to drink," Philly recalls. On one occasion, she had to get him out of bed so he would pick up the money that his mother had sent him, the only money they had that month to survive. "He was wiped out because he had been drinking absinthe the night before. It's one of the few times that I have seen him hungover," she explains.

This problem was visible from the outside as well: "after a bottle of something, it was difficult to control him. If you told him something, it could be difficult to control him. And if you said something, he would get upset. He didn't like censorship," Cunningham explains. It was a value he shared with Gat: "If he had had a lot to drink, he would get into *destroy mode.* After a certain point, he would lose control. This could be fun or interesting, but at other times, it was bothersome. I won't say aggressive, but bothersome, for sure."

On this page and the following: collages of Elvis Presley, figures made by Claude, personal portfolios with memories (advertising, photographs…)

Mark Cunningham appears playing the trumpet (page 171). Courtesy of Mark Cunningham and Marc Taeger

"Quien es la última [Who's last]," Illustration by Claude, courtesy of Mark Cunningham

CHAPTER 15

NO SOY HEMINGWAY

Kiss me, kiss me

I'm afraid of losing you again

Leave me… leave me alone

As if you had never even seen me

"Déjame… déjame solo," Raeo

Although Claude had distanced himself from music, he had made a few musical incursions during his years in Barcelona. His friend Gat was responsible for recording and publishing them, through his record label G33G; which throughout three decades, he has published dozens of records, linked especially to Barcelona's experimental music scene. The idea, this musician recalls, was started by Lydia Lunch, another key figure of the no-wave movement who also at that time lived in Barcelona. "She would say that it was a shame that none of Claude's poetry had been published. She suggested that it could be a good idea to get him out of the dark bars and record him," Gat explains.

With this starting point, he took his friend to the recording studio that he had in the Gràcia neighborhood. During one day, soaked in alcohol, they recorded three of Claude's poems. "We drank before, during and after the recording. Just in front we had a bar called El Semáforo. We would go there a lot," Gat remembers. Of the poems they recorded, two were included in the compilation *How to make it to the end of the Century* (1991), published by G33G.

One of these, titled "No soy Hemingway [I'm not Hemingway]," recited in English, evokes how an average afternoon could go for Claude, in those bars in Maragall that he often frequented:

> I sit in a Spanish bar with a cognac, a beer, and a gentle creeping numbness while on the television somewhere above the sausages and dusty bottles a young Andalusian bullfighter is awkwardly butchering a young Andalusian bull.
>
> They are both confused, and the bull is dripping blood and shit everywhere. The bullfighter is probably shitting in his tight and shiny pants.
>
> The beer and cognac go down to where they belong
>
> The numbness settles
>
> In a few minutes I will teach English to an engineer
>
> Or a little girl or a crazy lady who wears too much perfume
>
> And they will repeat after me stupid English words which they have no use for and no way of pronouncing correctly
>
> They pay me for this

I don't mind

I'm not Hemingway

It wasn't Claude's only recording published by G33G. Sometime after, he met with the group that Gat and Cunningham had together, Raeo, to record a version of "Bésame mucho," the Mexican classic by Consuelo Velázquez, remade into "Déjame solo." "We did an instrumental version of "Bésame mucho" with a drum machine, a bass and a trumpet. We had the idea to invite Claude, and it seemed fine to him, but he wanted to change the lyrics. So we combined what he had already written, which said "Déjame solo [leave me alone]," with the lyrics to the song "Hey Joe." We didn't have any idea what he was going to do, he pulled it out of his hat in the studio," Cunningham recounts.

In Barcelona, Claude also collaborated artistically with Graham Lewis, his good friend from England, who lived on the other edge of Europe, in Sweden. "I had written a letter with an English slang dictionary, and I sent him the letter. From the start, he said: "But what the hell is this?" The musician recalls and explains: "A few weeks later a cassette showed up with him reciting the letter, and I was left speechless: He surpassed my wildest expectations. He had an extraordinary voice." The result can be heard on the theme "Naked whooping and such-like (extended on and on)", by Wir, a group that existed temporarily as a split from Wire.

Lewis, just like our heroes, left London at the end of the 80s, tired of his little music world. He settled in Uppsala, a university town in Sweden, and his motivation for going there had a lot to do with Philly and Claude. He explains why: "My wife and I fell in love on a trip that we made to Barcelona. I had just met her, and I threw myself in the pool, asking if she wanted to come with me for a few days on vacation to a friend's house in Barcelona. There we fell in love and started going out together," Lewis Recounts. The recently formed couple even made plans to move to Barcelona, though finally, things didn't work out that way. "She ended up getting a job in Uppsala, to run a club, and since I was the artist, I didn't care if I was living in one place or another," Lewis remarks, who actually continues living in Uppsala with the same person.

Despite the almost 3,000-kilometer distance, Claude and Lewis stayed in touch regularly. "I got some tremendous telephone bills," the musician recalls. That argument over the validity of punk music stayed far away in the memory of that party in LA.

He wasn't the only friend from previous years who visited them in Barcelona. Jon Savage also remembers his visit to their apartment in Maragall: "I found myself among all of Claude's habits, and he put me to the test: he put on "Forming," from the Germs, very very loudly, and my head started shaking, like Beavis and Butt-Head. That brought him a lot of satisfaction: 'you're the same asshole as always,' he told me. It was a kind of test to see if I still had those ideals and if I still liked that music," the journalist explains.

Javier Escovedo, from The Zeros, one of the first groups interviewed by *Slash*, also retells an anecdote about his time spent visiting our heroes in Barcelona: "When The Zeros played in Barcelona in 95, we ate with Claude and Philomena, and at the end of our concert, Claude came out to sing 'Pushin' too hard' with us. It was so great, that instead of the real lyrics to the song, he said something about *Pussin' too hard. 'Pussin too hard'* turned into our battle cry for the rest of the tour. I had the feeling that

he wasn't a big fan of when the old punk bands would get back together, but I think he had a great time that night anyway."

Susan Martin, their old friend from Los Angeles, instead, holds onto a more uncomfortable memory from her reencounter with the couple in Barcelona: "I hadn't seen them in a long time, and honestly, I was left very bothered by it. I'm an alcoholic in rehabilitation and I had had my stint with drugs, but I was really startled by Claude's alcoholism. I was close to being completely sober, and it proved drastic to me. Everyone has always wanted Claude to publish his writings, I was one of those people, and that was when I realized that that would never happen."

Claude's problem with alcohol, effectively, had reached a tipping point. Stopping wasn't easy. "He attended an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, but he ran into a friend there, and they both went to a bar the same evening and stayed out late," Philly recounts. Nevertheless, her boyfriend did improve after turning to another center to ask for help. "He stopped drinking when a doctor told him that he was an alcoholic. He needed confirmation from a professional. After that, he never went back to drinking," she explains, and recalls that her boyfriend even preferred not to go to concerts to avoid the temptation of having alcohol nearby. His health, however, quickly turned into a much graver problem than what the couple had imagined.

Philly and Claude interviewing Roky Erickson, in an encounter in which it was practically impossible to get more than monosyllable answers out of the legendary musician (Photograph: Philomena Winstanley)

Claude Bessy, Nicole Panter and Philip K. Dick in 1979 (Nicole Panter's archive). Nicole, Claude and Philly were friends: "I wish Claude were still here. He was such a vital and astonishing force, so French and fun. I had some good adventures with him and Philomena," she confesses.

CHAPTER 16

THE END

Angels have no thoughts

Of ever returning you

Would they be angry

If I thought of joining you?

"Gloomy Sunday," Lydia Lunch

Everything changed abruptly for Claude and Philly on a trip to Galicia. They were in a small coastal town when he started feeling very ill. "We had gone there because we had the idea to go live closer to the ocean. It was terribly cold, and one night Claude couldn't warm up. I put a bunch of blankets on him, but it didn't help at all," Philly says. Upon returning to Barcelona, his chills didn't go away, and after insisting a lot, Claude finally went to the doctor. The news wasn't good. "They discovered a tumor in his lungs. They said it was very small, but they couldn't operate on it due to where it was. I believe now they could cure it, but back then it wasn't possible," she explains.

Afterwards, the weeks of uncertainty, anguish and acceptance came. "He didn't want to see anybody. His mom knew that he was sick, and his father had already died. I was in contact with his mother and told her to speak with Claude. He mustered up all the force he could to put on a strong voice," Philly recalls. Although Claude was frail on the inside, he didn't want anyone else to see his suffering: "He pretended that he was alright the whole time. He was a good patient, though we couldn't sleep in the same bed because of his pain. During this time, I spent the nights on the floor, on a thin mattress. He slept poorly, and during the day he also didn't feel well. He would go to the hospital alone for his chemotherapy treatments. He didn't want me to go with him."

And so the months went by as new complications arose. "I did accompany him to the hospital the last few times. He was too weak to go on his own. The nurses and doctors took good care of him. 'Oh Claude. How are you?' And he would say 'enjoying the summer.'" Behind closed doors, however, everything was much more difficult for the couple. "He didn't understand why I was taking care of him. He would tell me 'if it were you in this bed, I wouldn't be able to do a good job,' and I would tell him 'oh, okay, thanks.' I don't think it was like that, though he was terrible with nurses. Once when I had the flu, he wouldn't stop telling me to get out of bed. If you got sick, he didn't want to know anything about it. I knew that he was afraid I would die before him," Philomena tells me.

However, in this rough period, there was a glimmer of light: Claude asked Philly for her hand in marriage. "He knew that this way things would be easier for me when he was no longer around," she says. Her husband's character could be difficult, but she didn't have any doubts with respect to what was most important: "We were always in love. We got along very well."

On October 2nd, 1999, Claude Bessy passed away in the Sant Joan de Déu hospital, in Barcelona. He was 54 years old. His ashes were spread at sea, on the island of Tasos, in the north of Greece, according to his wishes. His wife explains why: "We would go every year to visit a sister of mine there, and Claude loved that place. It was illegal to cremate in Greece, so nobody could see us when we spread the ashes. I carried them in an urn, we went on a boat, all the way to the island, and we threw them with

a retsina bottle that a friend who used to drink with him had given me." Philly stayed there for the next few weeks, replying to letters of condolences arriving from the whole world over.

"He was a chronicler of the punk generation," Richard Thomas, Claude's friend, wrote of him in a eulogy published by the British newspaper *The Guardian*. In a weekly report from *LA Weekly,* from Los Angeles, two other old colleagues—John Doe and Exene Cervenka, from X—dedicated a poem to him:

Life's too fast Claude Bessy

explosive laugh

you had it

you had it all

and showed us all that

we were bigger and better

than we really were

like French working class

one last cigarette for you

tonight

love again

forever

goodbye

Claude left a giant mark on his friends from different periods of his life. "I cried for a week when he died. It was a very painful loss. He's one of the few people I have known who really wanted to live," Graham Lewis recalls. He explains how, two decades after his passing, he is still very present in his life. "A little while ago I was playing in San Francisco with Wire. I started talking with a guy who turned out to be Jello Biafra, and after five minutes, the topic of conversation turned to Claude. He had friends in all kinds of places. You could be at a concert and out of nowhere you'd hear Sting, from the other side of the room, shouting "Claude! Claude!" he remembers.

Susan Martin shares a similar living memory of him: "he was crazy, brilliant and fun. He was a marvelous human being." Her loss also left a mark on her. "It was hard to manage so much suffering with someone you love. I just hope to be capable of sharing the love that I felt for him."

Mark Cunningham, who lived close to Claude in his last days, remembers those very difficult final weeks: "With Claude I never talked about death. Those are complicated things, and we would avoid them- maybe I'm prepared now for something like that. It was difficult, but we kept seeing each other almost until the end." Alice Bag holds in her memory Claude the agitator from Los Angeles, brilliant and unpredictable. "He was one of those people you could trust because you knew he would tell you the truth, even if it might hurt," she says.

“Two decades later, Philly delves into something so delicate and intimate as the loss and absence of her husband. She does it with the kind of generosity that characterizes her: “I always think about him. I… Always. I talk to him. I have periods where I don’t do it so much, or I don’t do it as much as at first. For three years I was thinking the whole time about him. And after, when I changed my life, I stopped doing it so much.” After a long silence, she remarks: “I believe we fell in love with our conversations, with our minds together.”

Claude and Philly at home in Santa Monica (Archive, Philomena Winstanley)

EPILOGUE

LIFE IN SUCRE

Postcard from a friend of Philly and Claude's (Archive, Philomena Winstanley)

After Claude's death, Philly lived in Barcelona for a few more years. But, as she retells, she needed to change her life, to change her thoughts. She packed her bags and started travelling throughout the world. It was then when she got rid of her records, books, and, among many memories, the photos that appear in this book. She left for Madagascar, and, after a time there, travelled through Latin America. She was in Brazil, where one of her brothers lives, and travelled through the Amazon jungle, an experience that she wrote about in a few different magazine articles.

After many tours of different countries, she settled down in Sucre, the capital of Bolivia, where she has lived since the beginning of this decade. She likes the tranquility and that she can sustain herself without getting into a financial tight spot. She lives in a small house with two cats, where the only interruption to her serenity are the reggaeton karaoke parties that her neighbors sometimes put on. She has worked for an association helping children resources for many years. With limited resources, she has—among other activities—founded her own magazine, whose income she uses to fund activities with the children. "They love going to pools, '' she says and jokes about their *sticky fingers*, as she says, because once in a while they will snatch small things, like some lipstick or other similar household items, from her house.

She mentions how she likes to discover new corners of Bolivia, excursions that can be turned into authentic adventures, if she goes with the flow of some river or hops on a bus that has to improvise a new route (in those cases, the duration of the journey can be extended by many hours, or even more days than predicted). It's a completely different rhythm from her previous life, in Europe, where she only would travel once every three years to see friends and file some paperwork.

Her good physical fitness, she explains proudly, is thanks to the fact that she lives at the top of a hill, which keeps her in shape since she has to go up and down it a few times a day. When she thinks about the future, sometimes she considers returning to Spain. "I would like a calm town," she reveals. She also misses being able to go to museums, something she values about Madrid. "Do you think you'd have a place there for an old woman with cats?" she jokes.

It's been many years since she's listened to punk music, and she prefers to play records from calmer genres that some of her English friends in Bolivia pass to her. She stores some copies of *Slash*, although she is fairly detached for the most part from the musicians that she photographed years ago. Her punk past belongs to another era far from her current life.

But in her living room she still keeps the Fujica camera that Claude gifted her with the money he earned after throwing beer on that Hollywood bigwig.

Philly and Claude (Archive, Philomena Winstanley)

In the Backstage

Citations and Additional Information

This book was first published in the city of Madrid in April of 2019, the year of the 20th anniversary of Claude Bessy's passing. His voice seems more needed than ever: "BABYLON MUST FALL"